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## Press Release

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February 12, 2009  
Washington, DC

### **Awá Massacre Indicative of Lack of Protection for Colombia's Indigenous**

The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the U.S. Office on Colombia (USOC) and the Latin America Working Group Education Fund (LAWGEF) strongly condemn last week's massacre of 17 members of the indigenous Awá community and call on the Colombian Government to immediately investigate this situation, prosecute those responsible and institute an effective protection program for the remaining members of this community. The murders were reportedly committed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and among the victims were two women and a child. This massacre hits a community that has already been devastated by numerous displacements, murders and constant harassment from armed groups.

Reports received by WOLA indicate that indigenous communities are hard hit by violence, internal displacement and abuses committed by all parties to the conflict. On December 16, 2008, for example, Edwin Legarda, the husband of indigenous leader Aída Quilcué of the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (CRIC) was killed at the hands of Colombian soldiers. Shortly after the high profile death of Mr. Legarda, five Kankuamo indigenous persons died and 89 were injured due to a grenade attack in Atanquez.

The critical situation of the indigenous communities throughout Colombia led the National Organization of Indigenous Persons (ONIC) to recently announce that 32 indigenous ethnic groups are at risk of disappearing, with 18 smaller groups at risk of becoming physically and culturally extinct in the near future. WOLA, USOC and LAWGEF urge the U.S. Embassy to support the formation of an emergency program focused on indigenous communities in danger of extinction, created by indigenous organizations and headed by the ONIC. We urge the FARC to respect international humanitarian law and end any and all attacks against the civilian population.

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