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CC: Colombian Ministers for Mining,
Justice, and Public Defense

May 11, 2004

Dear Sirs:

We condemn your disgraceful treatment of the communities surrounding the Cerrejon Norte coal mine in Colombia. On April 16, 2004, armed officials, supervised by mine employees, dragged members of the Sarahita community from their homes and then bulldozed their homes as part of the mine's expansion. This behavior is unacceptable.

Residents from the Wayuu indigenous community of Tamaquitos and others are under extreme pressure from the mine to sell their land and relocate. Tamaquitos has been devastated by the mine's expansion. The community is finding it increasingly difficult to survive because it no longer has access to public transportation, education, health services, or food sources.

We are extremely concerned that Tamaquitos will face a similar fate to that of Sarahita and Tabaco. The residents of Tamaquitos have repeatedly asked to be relocated to productive agricultural land with adequate compensation. It is your responsibility to relocate this community, according to their needs.

As you are aware, in August 2001 the Afro-Colombian community of Tabaco was forcibly relocated with no warning. Residents were not even allowed to remove their personal belongings before their homes were bulldozed. Now two years after the Colombian Supreme Court ordered the municipality of Hatonuevo to find adequate land that the community of Tabaco approved of, these people remain displaced. Furthermore, some of these displaced persons have received threats to their lives. It is urgent that the citizens of Tabaco are moved to a site that they approve of.

Recently, the World Bank commissioned the Extractive Industries Review (EIR). This EIR calls for prior and formal consent of communities before implementing projects. We ask that you also adopt the EIR guidelines.

We also understand that there are plans to divert for mining activities the River Ranchería, the most important watercourse in the dry province of La Guajira. This could be tremendously damaging for many communities which rely on its waters.

There are other environmental concerns. Communities living around the mine suffer from asthma and black lung disease as well as water that is polluted by toxins used in the mining process. We are concerned that no action has been taken to address these grave, long-term human health and environmental problems.

We ask that you respond to these issues as a matter of priority.

Sincerely,

PressurePoint

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