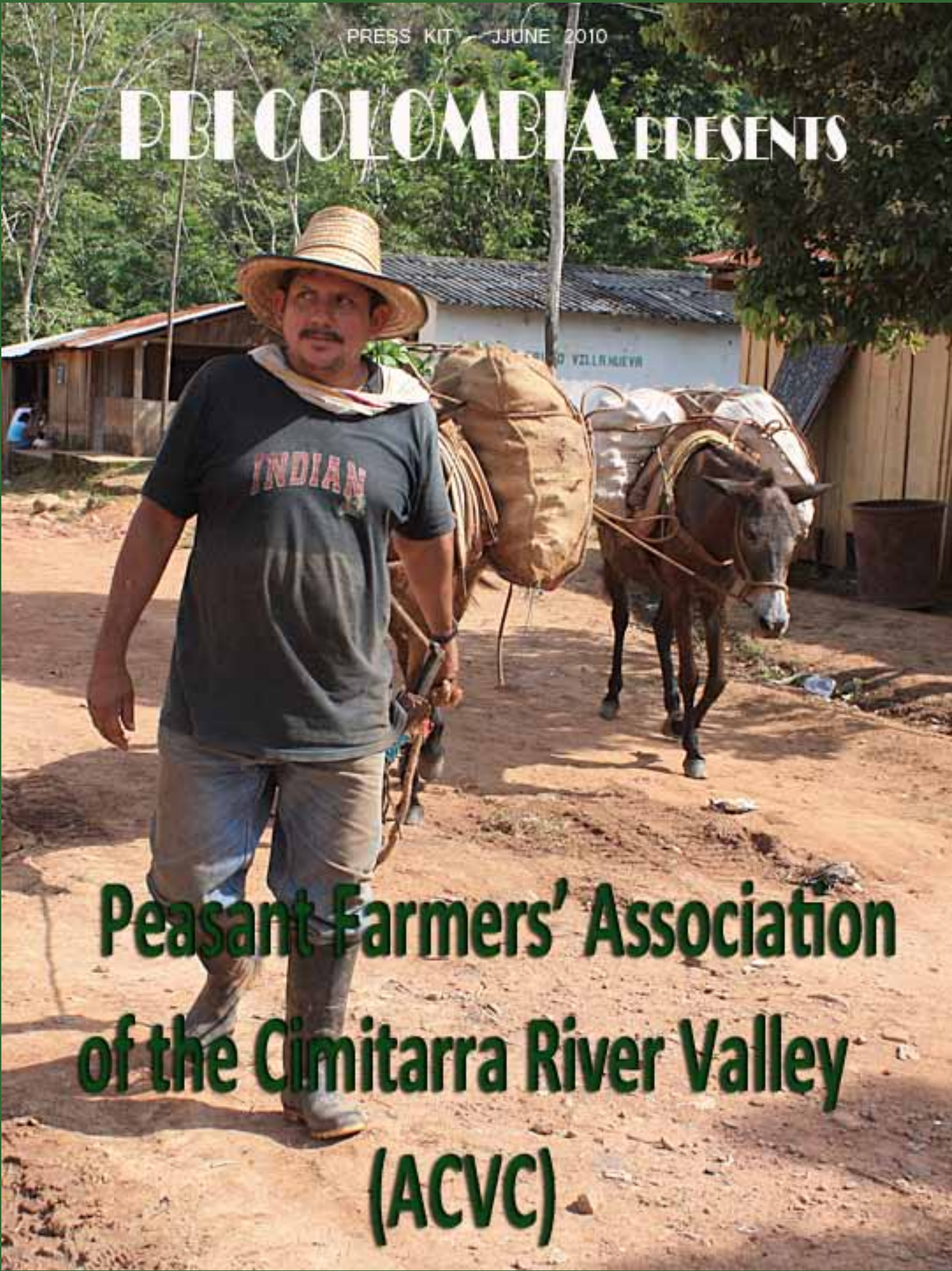


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PBI COLOMBIA PRESENTS



**Peasant Farmers' Association
of the Cimitarra River Valley
(ACVC)**

PBI has accompanied the Peasant Farmers' Association of the Cimitarra River Valley (ACVC) since 2007.



Sandrine Detroz (PBI) , Andrés Gil (ACVC) and Carly Dawson (PBI).

The Peasant Farmers' Association of the Cimitarra River Valley (ACVC)¹ is a regional organisation bringing together community proposals from 120 community action boards², cooperatives, fishing committees, and other rural worker associations, within the framework of the comprehensive defence of human rights and the struggle for land. The organisation has approximately 25,000 members who are small-scale farmers.

The ACVC carries out social, political and community work in nearly 120 small rural communities, located in eight municipalities in the region of the Magdalena Medio.

The organisation focuses its work on the Peasant Farmer Reserve Zone and its Sustainable Development Plan,

which focuses on issues of human rights, education, health, and agriculture³. The Association also concentrates on organising, education and political work in order to help organise processes that have as their aim the redistribution of land, respect for human rights, and improvement of the lives of traditional small farmers (in the short term), as well as favourable conditions for the structural changes needed in the Colombian countryside (in the long term).

ACVC productive projects work to achieve food security for the traditional rural population from the Cimitarra River Valley. Some of the Association's projects include the following:

- Agro-industrial sugarcane development
- Agro-industrial rice production

THE ACVC HAS APPROXIMATELY 25,000 MEMBERS WHO ARE SMALL-SCALE FARMERS AND CARRIES OUT SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND COMMUNITY WORK IN NEARLY 120 SMALL RURAL COMMUNITIES, LOCATED IN EIGHT MUNICIPALITIES IN THE REGION OF THE MAGDALENA-MEDIO.

- Small-scale water buffalo and cattle ranching
- Community aqueduct construction
- Construction and development of fishing pools
- Fishing production
- Basic sanitation
- Housing improvements

In this respect, the ACVC has undertaken community development, food security and human rights projects⁴. Different organisations have financed these projects, including the Magdalena Medio Peace and Development Programme, the European Union Peace Laboratory, the United Nations Development Programme, the Spanish Red Cross, and Misereor. Projects have also received government funds from the Agrarian Bank, the Financial Fund for Development Projects (FONADE), the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Interior, and local municipal governments.

Since 2008, the ACVC has carried out a solidarity campaign to publicise the ACVC's work through the self-published report *La Marcha* and on the campesino-run news website *Prensa Rural*.

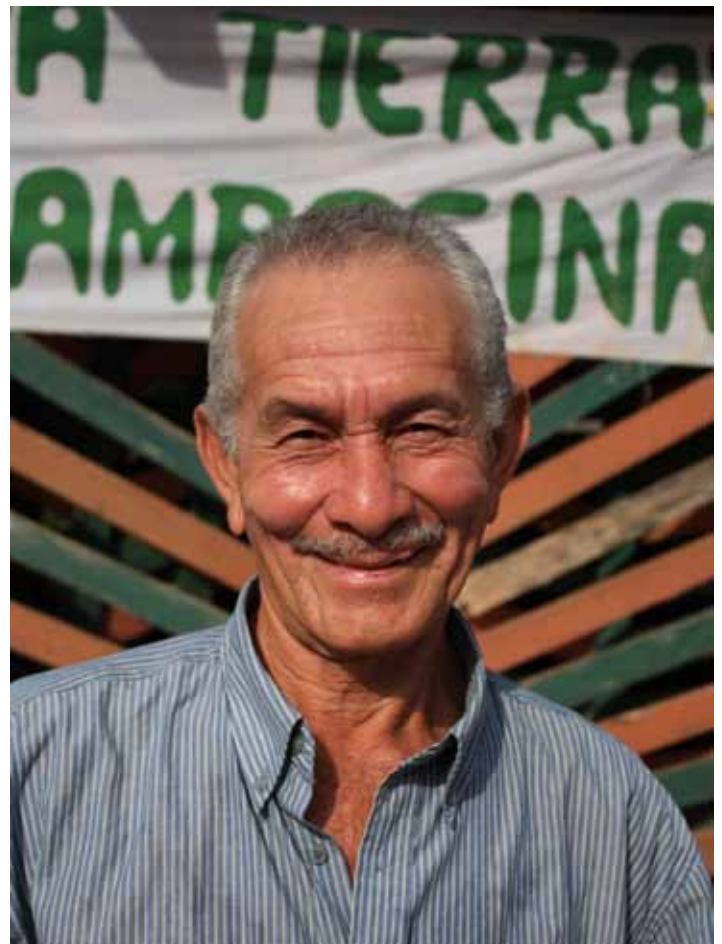
The history of the ACVC

The ACVC was founded in 1996, during the peasant farmer marches⁵ to San Pablo and Barrancabermeja to demand the government provide social investment and respect human rights. In 1998, the ACVC participated in the peasant farmer exodus, an event during which the traditional small farmers –after three months of negotiations– were able to have then-President of Colombia Andrés Pastrana agree to several commitments. In the area of human rights, an investigatory group would be established to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators and instigators of crimes committed by paramilitaries and government officials. Addition-

ally, State funds were to be allocated for a comprehensive development plan designed by the communities.

ACVC members face unsubstantiated charges

Since its creation, ACVC members have been the victims of murders, death threats, arbitrary detentions, forced displacements, forced disappearances, acts of torture, the destruction of housing, and food and medical blockades. Five ACVC members were murdered⁶.



Member of the ACVC.



Laura Naegele (PBI) and Miguel Ángel González Huepa (ACVC).

Another member, Miguel Cifuentes, survived an armed attack by paramilitaries⁷.

ACVC members Andrés Gil, Óscar Duque, Mario Martínez, and Evaristo Mena, were detained on 29 September 2007 following a raid on the ACVC's apartment and office in Barrancabermeja. The following day, military spokespersons told the press that 18 arrest warrants had been issued against the ACVC. As a result, many of the persons who were not arrested fled the country, temporarily suspending their activities with the ACVC.

Four months later, on 19 January 2008, other key ACVC members, Ramiro Ortega and Miguel Ángel González Huepa, were arrested under charges of rebellion. The son of the latter, Miguel Ángel González Gutiérrez was murdered the following week. He was 23 years old and an active member of the Humanitarian Action Corporation for Co-Existence and Peace in Northeast Antioquia

(CAHUCOPANA). Troops belonging to the Calibío Battalion of the Colombian Army's 14th Brigade reported him as a guerrilla member killed in combat⁸.

ACQUITTAL AND RELEASE FROM PRISON

On 23 April 2008, the 37th prosecutor from the Human Rights Unit in Medellín ordered the investigations to be closed against Óscar Duque, Mario Martínez, and Evaristo Mena, immediately releasing them from prison. On 16 May of the same year, the investigation against Ramiro Ortega was closed due to lack of evidence, and he was subsequently by the same prosecutor.

On 9 June 2009, Miguel Ángel González Huepa was acquitted of the charges after a seventeen-month trial marked by multiple delays of hearings and incongruent and contradictory testimony⁹.

On 2 July 2009, the Prosecutor General's Office revoked



Members of the ACVC.

the arrest warrants for Luis Carlos Ariza, Miguel Cifuentes, Exenober Polanía, Eladio Morales, Wilson Vega, Gilberto de Jesús Guerra and Henry Palomo, other ACVC members charged with the crime of rebellion¹⁰. According to the arguments in this decision, sufficient grounds did not exist to consider the need to impose the incarceration of the previously mentioned persons. Nonetheless, the criminal investigation remains open.

On 31 August, Andrés Gil was released on probation¹¹ without concluding the criminal investigation based on the testimony used in the case against Miguel Á. González, which the judge had recognised as lacking veracity and coherence.

The imprisonment of these members was a strong blow to the ACVC, which had to invest time and resources to defend those facing the charges. Presently, the ACVC is returning to its work with «commitment,

will and determination for an organisation that stands up for the peasant farmer population from the Cimitarra River Valley»¹².

Extrajudicial executions in the Peasant Reserve Zone

In the Peasant Reserve Zone there have been 16 cases of extrajudicial executions, a practice in which members of State security forces kill civilians, generally peasants or the unemployed, and present them as guerrilla members killed in combat¹³. At first, most of the cases were sent to the military criminal justice system, but later they were sent to the ordinary justice system, specifically the Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office. To date, no one has been convicted for these crimes, even though more than five years have passed in some cases¹⁴.

Peasant Reserve Zone in the Cimitarra River Valley

Since 1998, the ACVC has tried to establish a Peasant Reserve Zone in the Cimitarra River Valley. The Reserve Zone is a legal concept recognised by Law 160 of 1994. It is also considered to be an instrument that guarantees peasants have access to land, prevents the concentration of property, and protects the traditional farming economy and food security.

On 10 December 2002, the Uribe Vélez government, through the former Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCORA) –presently the Colombian Institute of Rural Development (INCODER)–, issued resolution 028 of 2002, which created the Peasant Reserve Zone in the Cimitarra River Valley. The resolution was suspended on 10 April 2003. Since then, as part of its work defending the rights of traditional small farmers, the ACVC has demanded that the suspension be lifted, basing this argument on legal codes.

The Peasant Reserve Zone comprises 550,000 hectares, 370,000 of which are Forest Reserve. For the inhabitants, the objective of the Reserve Zone is the right to land, the right to the possession of land, and the prevention of new forced displacements¹⁵.

Natural resources in the region¹⁶

The region is rich in such natural resources as gold, oil, timber, water, animals, and vegetation. According to Francisco de la Roux, «the northern central part of the country is vital. Most of the oil is refined in this area. It is where different highways meet connecting the Andean cities. It has routes to the Caribbean, Venezuela, the southern valleys, and will connect Caracas with the Pacific. It is a land rich in gold and ecological diversity». The oil industry plays a fundamental role in the region's economic activity. Seventy percent of the national output is produced in this region. According to documents describing the region published on the web page for



Peasant farmer from «La Cristilina» farm in the Noreste Antioqueño department.

SINCE ITS CREATION, ACVC MEMBERS HAVE BEEN THE VICTIMS OF MURDERS, DEATH THREATS, ARBITRARY DETENTIONS, FORCED DISPLACEMENTS, FORCED DISAPPEARANCES, ACTS OF TORTURE, THE DESTRUCTION OF HOUSING, AND FOOD AND MEDICAL BLOCKADES

the Magdalena Medio Peace and Development Programme, agriculture is the second most important activity for the peasant economy. The principal crops include corn, cacao, yucca, plantain, rice, and sorghum. Though small surpluses are produced, these crops play an important role providing food for family nutritional needs.

Livestock and oil palm production have also increased as economic activities. However, instead of creating opportunities that improve living standards for the population, they have generally increased inequalities and worsened the conflict.

Security and protection measures

In 2002, the Colombian government issued precautionary measures to protect ACVC members, as requested by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The ACVC continues to benefit from these measures.

International accompaniment

In 2007, PBI began provisional accompaniment of the ACVC. In 2007 and 2008, ACVC members received several threats from illegal armed actors, in addition to harassment from the Colombian army. Due to the increased threats against ACVC members, PBI broadened its accompaniment of the ACVC, emphasising our advocacy work to visibilise the problems faced by the organisation and region in which it works.

Published information

“Fear for safety – death threats”, Amnesty International, 27 June 2008¹⁷.

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Oscar Duque and Ramiro Ortega (ACVC).

1. «La ACVC: una organisation campesina perseguida injustamente por el estado colombiano, ACVC», Prensa Rural, 26 October 2007, <http://www.prensarural.org/spip/spip.php?article816>; «Caso ACVC: sigue vigente orden de captura contra varios dirigentes por negligencia de autoridades judiciales», Humanidad Vigente, Prensa Rural, 2 July 2008, <http://www.prensarural.org/spip/spip.php?article1347>; «Ejército Nacional asesina a miembro de Cahucopana hijo de dirigente campesino», CAHUCOPANA, Prensa Rural, 29 January 2008, <http://www.prensarural.org/spip/spip.php?article994>.
2. Interview with Ramiro Ortega, ACVC.
3. The ACVC carries out workshops on human rights and economics, in addition to trainings on fishing, agriculture and health, with the traditional small farmers from the region.
4. The ACVC has projects in housing, sugar cane and cereal production, fish farming and small animal husbandry, as well as with cattle and water buffalo.
5. Approximately 10,000 traditional small farmers marched to Barrancabermeja in 1996.
6. Three presidents of community action boards and two members of the ACVC board of directors were murdered.
7. Press release, ACVC, 5 March 2003.
8. «Clausurada formación de promotores de derechos humanos en el nordeste antioqueño», Prensa Rural, 10 December 2008.
9. «El dirigente campesino de la ACVC recupera su libertad. Absuelto Miguel Ángel González Huepa Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra», Prensa Rural, 9 June 2009.
10. «Se cancelan órdenes de captura contra líderes campesinos de la ACVC», Prensa Rural, 14 July 2009.
11. «En libertad Andrés Gil, dirigente de la ACVC

encarcelado por el régimen durante casi dos años», 1 September 2009, ddhhcolombia.org.co.

12. According to the ACVC, March 2010.
13. This figure only concerns cases occurring since 2004.
14. Information provided by the ACVC, February 2010.
15. Interview with Oscar Duque, ACVC founding member, July 2009. ACVC members believe that «the Colombian State should invest in this Reserve Zone because [the inhabitants] deserve [their] rights. Which rights? The right to life, land, housing, health, education, free expression, and commercialization and investment».
16. See: <http://www.peaceobservatory.org/index.php?id=124>.
17. See: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR23/021/2008/en/be9a17d5-448d-11dd-a853-cb8a3d8264d3/amr230212008eng.html>.

