

Colombia. Communities begin the humanitarian caravan in Chocó in the face of the presence of armed groups

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They are warning about the militarization of the territory and proposing the creation of a humanitarian refuge for displacement victims.

Members of the communities of the San Juan River and its tributaries, in the department of Chocó (northwestern Colombia), began on Monday a humanitarian caravan of living and staying in the territory of this river course to warn about the crisis they face due to the militarization of the territory and the deepening social and armed conflict.

The participants of the caravan left Itsmina and Bajo Calima on Monday on a boat trip through several villages that will last until October 15.

The journey serves to denounce systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

It also seeks to draw the attention of the Colombian state, civil society and the international community to the dramatic humanitarian situation in the region.

In addition, it supports the development of a humanitarian shelter for victims of forced displacement who have not yet been able to return to their territories.

Participating groups, such as the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) and the Guardia Cimarrona, denounced that in addition to military groups, paramilitaries, members of the

National Liberation Army (ELN) insurgency, and dissidents from the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) are also operating in the area.

According to the organizations, clashes between the armed actors have led to the forced displacement of more than 900 black and indigenous families, as well as the disappearance and murder of children and social leaders.

In the opinion of Edgar Chavez, spokesman for the national association of displaced Colombians, the caravan can have an impact on ending the harassment of communities, who also suffer from confinement and are prevented from accessing their sources of income and food.

For the coordinator of the Cimarrona Guard in Chocó, Jeison Mosquera, the public order situation in the department is linked to the abandonment of the communities by President Iván Duque's government.

Previously, communities in Chocó have denounced harassment by armed groups, including in the midst of Covid-19 or the floods that occurred in areas of Bajo and Medio San Juan. In addition to bombings by the national army, the laying of landmines on roads has also been denounced.

According to local media, the course of the San Juan River is used by illegal armed groups as a corridor for arms and drug trafficking.