

The Institute of the Black World 21st Century Statement on the Crisis in Buenaventura, Colombia

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The Institute of the Black World (IBW) is delighted to learn from friends and allies in Latin America that after almost three weeks of social unrest and state violence inflicted on the Black population by the security forces in Colombia's largest port city, Buenaventura, the civic strike leaders reached an agreement with the national government on June 5, 2017, and the strike has been suspended.

Protest organizers believe that this is a major and historical moment, not only for the people in Buenaventura, but for the Black movement and people across Colombia and Latin America, more broadly.

With a Black population of close to 15 million, Colombia has the fifth largest community of African-descended people in the Americas. Buenaventura has a population of 400,000, with over an 80% African descendant population. It is the most impoverished city in Colombia and one of the major ports on the South American continent.

For many years the city has been plagued by the Colombian armed conflict, by drug trafficking and by the presence of armed militia groups.

The Buenaventura agreement will create a special autonomous fund with resources that is to be considered the "patrimony of the people in Buenaventura". It also promises to invest an initial amount of \$1.5 billion (Colombian currency) to attend to improving the basic infrastructure for water, health and basic sanitation services in urban areas of Buenaventura and its surroundings.

The agreement also calls for an integrated development plan for the city that will seek to implement reform policies and programs aimed at making Buenaventura a port "for the people and not simply for profit".

Black community organizers in Colombia tell IBW that although it has been a historic victory, this is not the end. "Agreements are something the Colombian government easily ignores", said one civic leader. "The people of Buenaventura and African descendant people, more broadly in Colombia, will continue to struggle for self-determination and to our sisters and brothers around the world we say your fraternal support continues to be very much appreciated".

Responses to the strike by most people in the country revealed the racist side of many white Colombians and much of the Colombian government. The mostly Black protests that brought thousands of people into the streets for several days also revealed centuries of anti-Black racism, social exclusion and crushing poverty suffered by the vast majority of the country's African population.

The Institute of the Black World 21st Century remains concerned that many residents of Buenaventura continue to fear increased state repression, in spite of the agreement between the City's civil society leaders and the central government. They seem willing to continue to press demands for the delivery of basic public services like clean drinking water and a functioning hospital continue, a quest and an objective that IBW supports and encourages.

The Institute of the Black World 21st Century is calling on the Congressional Black Caucus, the Progressive Caucus, the NAACP, the National Action Network, the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and leaders of the faith community to pressure the U.S. government to demand that the government of Colombia protect its African descendant citizens and fulfill their just demands for resources to create a better life.

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