

GEILER ROMAÑA's VOICE

“My name is Geiler Romaña, I am 38 years old. I was born in Tagachì, a small village in the Chocó Department of the Pacific Colombian region. On my father's side of the family there are 17 brothers. I am married with two children.

My personal experience of racism and racial discrimination which I am going to share with you is just one amongst thousands of cases which are lived daily by afro descendents and other ethnic groups in Colombia. Allow me to tell you that we black communities only began to exist in the eyes of the Colombian State since the new Constitution enacted in 1991. The new Constitution recognizes ethnic and cultural diversity in the country and as a result law 70/93 was created with the aim of protecting the territorial and cultural rights of black communities in Colombia.

With the enactment of this legislation in 1996, a process of collective recognition was initiated to acknowledge the rights of the afro Colombian community who had historically inhabited the Colombian pacific, inter Andean and Caribbean region. You may ask what this has to do with my personal experience of racism? I would like to inform you that not only is it related to my own personal story, but also to that experienced by almost one million afro descendents forced from their land in Colombia. The forced displacement of afro Colombian communities living in the region began in 1996 when violence was employed by armed groups to remove us from our land.

This brings to mind the day the paramilitary groups came to the village and took over our home to carry out their military operations. I also remember the day when the news arrived that during an armed confrontation between paramilitaries and the guerrilla in the nearby village, a cylinder bomb was thrown at a church in which the community was seeking refuge from the violence, a holy place which could not prevent the death of 119

a very big city which is totally different in terms of climate and culture from Chocó.

There we had to begin again, living in precarious conditions, without job, without money to satisfy our most basic needs. It was really difficult in these circumstances to adapt ourselves to this new environment. There, we had to start all over again, with the hostility of the residents who looked at us for what we were, foreign people who had come to invade their place, with

from entering their venues based on racial discrimination, prompted various Congress members to propose developing legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination.

I appreciate your taking the time to listen to me and sharing your personal experiences with me. Don't forget that we must unite our voices to end the crime of racism and racial discrimination so that we can eradicate all forms of human rights violations based on the superiority of races or other aspects which impede human beings from living with dignity.

Thank you”.