

Marino Cordoba – Biography

10 May 1964

Following in the footsteps of his father, Marino Cordoba is a community organizer fighting for the rights of his community, the Afro-Colombians, as well as other marginalised groups. He is from the Riosucio region in north-western Colombia, a jungle region with high biodiversity. In the early 1990's, government authority in the area was weak and much of the power lay with paramilitaries supported by powerful economic actors.

Marino fought for the recognition of land rights of the local communities many of whom faced the loss of their land to powerful commercial interests, notably in logging and mining. These powerful interests were able to secure licenses through corrupt politicians without recognizing the property rights that communities had as ancestral possessors. As a trade union organizer, he also worked with the banana workers union to secure better salaries, health services and respect for union work.

Marino was one of the key leaders behind the constitutional changes in 1991 that recognized Afro-Colombians as one of the minority communities. This led to law 70 in 1993 that gave Afro-Colombians rights over their collective land, natural resources, minerals and their environment, as well access to political participation in the Colombian congress.

On 20 December 1996, seven days after the government recognized rights of Marino's community, a joint military and paramilitary intervention **"Operation Genesis"** began to expel Afro-Colombians from their territories, take possession of their lands and install external economic projects. Marino had faced death threats and attacks for his work for years. However, he and tens of thousands of other had to flee.

After hiding for weeks in the jungle, Marino found refuge in Bogota. In 1999, he founded AFRODES (the National Association for displaced Afro-Colombians) and started working on assistance for the displaced, legal challenges on behalf of victims, and solutions to allow for their return home. As Marino visibility rose, his security situation got worse, and in 2002 he was attacked and shot in the leg.

After further several assassination attacks, supporters in the US congress arranged for him to seek asylum in the US. There he continued his work on behalf the Afro-Colombian community, by building a network of supporting politicians, academics, human rights organizations and other civil society actors. He has mobilized political support to promote justice and restore lands taken by paramilitary groups and businesses, and block US funding for palm oil projects linked to the paramilitaries. He has also worked to have the US Congress link military assistance to human rights.

In 2012, despite the high risk, Marino returned to Colombia while leaving his family in the United States. Initially the Colombian authorities did not want to provide protection. Marino then received several threats and was attacked. The US government intervened on his behalf asking the Colombian authorities to provide him security. Marino credits the support of the US Government as a major factor in advancing the human rights of Afro-Colombians and internally displaced persons. Marino became the president of AFRODES and has

worked tirelessly and successfully to strengthen the Afro-Colombian movement and advocate for its interests. Marino is particularly proud of the Ethnic Chapter in the peace agreement that identifies the Afro-Colombian community as an affected community. Furthermore, that the National Government and the FARC-EP recognize that ethnic peoples have contributed to building a lasting and sustainable peace, progress, economic and social development of the country, and have suffered historic conditions of injustice as a product of colonialism, slavery, marginalization, and dispossession from their land, territory, and resources. They have additionally been affected by the internal armed conflict and should be guaranteed full access to their human and collective rights in the context of their own aspirations, interests, and world views.

The success of this work has created more danger for Marino, his family, his colleagues and his community. His close colleague Bernardo Cuero Bravo was murdered in 2017, and one of Bernardo children. Miller Angulo de Tumaco was killed in 2012 weeks after his arrival in Colombia. AFRODES leaders have regularly received threats from paramilitary and unknown groups, and Marino has been himself physically attacked several times.

Most painfully and personally, Wilmar, Marino's son was murdered in 2017 in Riosucio. The authorities have not identified those responsible. Wilmar and his mother remained during Operation Genesis, and he grew up in Choco.

The AFRODES leadership, especially Marino, face ongoing security risks. Marino is accompanied at all times by his two bodyguards and an armored bullet-proof car that is paid for by the government, but even they can't guarantee their security due to the constant risks involved in being a leader in Colombia. Since the signing of the peace agreement more than four hundred (400) ethnic and social leaders have been killed.