

PUBLIC

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20 June 2008

UA 180/08 Fear for safety/Death Threats

COLOMBIA	César Plazas (m)]	
	David Florez (m)]	
	Nohora Villamizar (f)]	
	Fernando Porras (m)]	trade unionists
	Javier Correa (m)]	
	Martha Cecilia Díaz (f)]	
	César Tamayo (m)]	
	Belcy Rincón (f)]	
	William Rivera (m)]	
	Gustavo Mendoza (m)]	social activists and human rights defenders
	Carolina Rubio (f)]	

A paramilitary group has threatened to kill the trade unionists and social activists named above, who live or work in the city of Bucaramanga, Santander Department. Their lives may be in danger.

On 19 June unknown men left a letter containing death threats in an envelope at the housing complex where trade unionist Belcy Rincón lives in the municipality of Floridablanca, Santander Department. Her home and mobile telephone numbers were written on the envelope, as well as her address. The letter accused Belcy Rincón's trade union, *Sintraclínicas*, which represents health workers, of being "a burrow of guerrillas" (*una madriguera de guerrilleros*). The letter also said that the union's members would soon be "exterminated like cockroaches" (*pronto serán exterminados como cucarachas*). The death threat was signed by the Black Eagles (*Águilas Negras*) paramilitary group.

On 11 June a man on a motorbike stopped in front of the house of César Tamayo, president of the peasant farmers' trade union *Asociación Agraria de Santander*, Agrarian Association of Santander. When Tamayo's 11-year-old son answered the door, the man, his face hidden by his helmet, handed him an envelope containing an announcement of the death of César Tamayo and the others named above, apart from Belcy Rincón. Beside each name there was a cross.

The note declared them to be military targets and accused them of being guerrillas and of promoting antipatriotic marches against "decent people who produce wealth in the city and in the countryside" (*la gente de bien que produce riqueza en la ciudad y el campo*). The note also read, "a Colombia free of guerrillas - yes! NGOs, defenders of narco-guerrillas, NO! RIP!" (*Colombia libre de guerrilleros...Sí, ONGs Defensoras de losNarcoterroristas NO! QEPD!*). This death threat was also signed by the Black Eagles.

For the last three months trade unions and human rights NGOs in Bucaramanga have been organizing and taking part in demonstrations supporting workers' rights. They have also been publicly condemning the activities of the Black Eagles (*Águilas Negras*) in Santander Department. This has made them targets of paramilitary death threats. For more information on paramilitary death threats against trade unionist and social activists in Bucaramanga, see UA 115/08, AMR 23/014/2008, 30 April 2008.

César Plazas, David Florez, Nohora Villamizar and Fernando Porras are members of the Santander branch of the Trade Union Congress (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*). Javier Correa is a member of the National Union of

Food Industry Workers (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos*). Martha Cecilia Díaz is the president of the Public Services Workers' Union of Santander (*Asociación Santandereana de Servidores Públicos*). Belcy Rincón is member of the health workers' union *Sintraclínicas*. William Rivera, Gustavo Mendoza and Carolina Rubio are members of the non-governmental human rights organization Committee of Solidarity for Political Prisoners (*Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos*).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During Colombia's 40-year armed conflict, human rights organizations, trade unions and other social organizations have often been labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and paramilitaries. As a result they often suffer threats, enforced disappearance or killings. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders they consider to be siding with the enemy.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to do everything necessary to protect trade unionists and social activists César Plazas, David Florez, Nohora Villamizar, Fernando Porras, William Rivera, Gustavo Mendoza, Carolina Rubio, Javier Correa, Martha Cecilia Díaz, César Tamayo and Belcy Rincón, in the department of Santander, in accordance with their own wishes;
- calling on them to order full and impartial investigations into the death threats received on 16 and 19 June, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on them to take decisive action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups and investigate and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations;
- calling on the authorities to produce policy and plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders, to guarantee their safety according to the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and to make these plans public.

APPEALS TO:

President

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 337 5890

Salutation: Dear President Uribe/Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe

Governor of Santander Department

Sr. Horacio Serpa Uribe, Gobernador del Departamento de Santander

Gobernación de Santander, Calle 37, No. 10-30, Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Fax: +57 7 633 98 89

Salutation: Dear Governor Serpa/Sr. Gobernador Serpa

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C, Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Fiscal/Dear Mr Iguarán

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos

Calle 26 No. 4 A-45 piso 12 torre KLM, Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 August 2008.