



On the front line

Bulletin on human rights defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean

COLOMBIA: Human rights defenders call on government to set up meaningful dialogue

On 9 September 2002, Colombian Human Rights Day, some 35 Colombian human rights defenders, representatives of international organizations, the diplomatic community and the Colombian government gathered in the Colombian Congress to witness an event which celebrated the legitimacy and importance of the work of Colombian human rights defenders in the face of very real dangers.

Amnesty International members in Canada had worked for many months to create 17 colourful quilts that expressed their solidarity with human rights activists in Colombia. The



Carlos Rosero, of the *Proceso de Comunidades Negras*, Black Communities Process, makes a speech at the Human Rights Day event in Bogotá, Colombia.

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presentation of these quilts to representatives of human rights organizations in Bogotá became an important declaration of the ongoing international scrutiny of the Colombian government's actions to prevent attacks against defenders; scrutiny that is now more important than ever as human rights groups face increasing attempts to restrict their work.

During the event that was attended by the Colombian Vice-President, 16 solidarity quilts were presented to human

rights defenders from various human rights groups including the Afro-Colombian community, trade-unionists and indigenous communities.

Nineteen Colombian human rights organizations also presented to the new Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe Vélez, an open letter in which they laid out their concerns regarding the protection of human rights defenders and the prevention of attacks against them. They invited the new President to set up a permanent and meaningful dialogue with human rights defenders in order to fully address these concerns.

Dialogue between Colombian human rights defenders and the previous Colombian government of Andrés Pastrana was limited. It was only following the abduction by army-backed paramilitaries in January 1999 (and subsequent release) of four members of a human rights organization in Medellín, that President Pastrana finally agreed to a meeting. In this meeting, human rights groups requested that the government take up proposals regarding the

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protection of human rights defenders that they had put to the previous administration in 1997 during the term of Ernesto Samper Pizano. While some of

these proposals have been partially implemented-principally those regarding the provision of practical protection measures- most of the more

far-reaching concerns have yet to be addressed. The following are extracts from the open letter.

Open Letter to President Alvaro Uribe Vélez, Bogotá, D.C., 9 September 2002

“(...) Mr President,

For many years the human rights organizations to which we belong have been publicly and transparently working to provide information and critical analysis of the facts and measures adopted by governments which in the eyes of international law violate or threaten human rights. This work, which is carried out in the country itself and on various international stages, is available to be freely examined by public opinion, governments and specialist bodies and is subject to the rules and procedures contained in national and international law which seek to ensure balance when there are differences of opinion about cases or general situations.

“In this sense, we would like to express our willingness to engage in any public and private discussions with your government which might help to assess the veracity of reports about any acts or omissions for which state actors may be responsible, as well as to participate in the debate around legal and political arguments regarding the appropriateness and constitutionality of the security policies adopted by your government and what human rights measures should be adopted to overcome the humanitarian crisis facing the country.

“Nevertheless, Mr President, we must point out that our

willingness to engage in frank and open debate requires an unequivocal willingness on the part of your government to ensure that it can take place in an atmosphere in which the exercise of our work to promote and protect human rights is fully guaranteed. On this point, human rights organizations have been extremely concerned to see press reports, backed up by government sources and not denied by your government, indicating that one of the components of the government’s anti-terrorist strategy it to “counteract the work of NGOs abroad”, and that this is to be the responsibility of the Office of the Vice-Presidency and the Colombian Embassy in Canada (*El Tiempo*, August 18, p. 4).

“Fanny Kertzman, your government’s Ambassador in Canada, said on this matter, “We are going to move ahead and take the offensive on information about human rights ... We are going to curb the arbitrariness and unfairness of many NGOs”.

“What is worrying about these statements is not in the least that your government should be seeking to exercise your right to provide the international community with information, explanations and arguments which you deem useful in justifying the measures you believe it is legitimate to adopt to confront the difficult situation affecting public order and the

safety of citizens but that you should see “counter-acting the work of NGOs abroad” as part of your anti-terrorist strategy, thereby increasing the misconceptions that already exist about the work of NGOs.

“It is not, therefore, Mr President, the legitimate debate about ideas, arguments and information that worries our organizations. Frank and open debate is an active form of government diplomacy and is welcome. We are ready to participate and for our part we will do so with the utmost responsibility with the intention of overcoming the crisis affecting human rights and international humanitarian law. What does concern us is that the government, on the basis of mistaken or McCarthyite prejudices about our work, should see critical views about the negative effects that public order measures might have for the observance of human rights as part of a veiled intention to support guerrilla groups or to weaken the State’s ability to deal with the situation arising from the armed conflict.

“In the past, defamatory statements and false accusations that social and human rights organizations allegedly support the guerrillas or share their interests have been used as a means of weakening the credibility and legitimacy of our organizations. The adverse effect of that has been that social and human rights activists and leaders



Maria Barrios, of *Diálogo Mujer* and *Movimiento Actoras por la Paz*, Women's Dialogue and Movement of Women Peace Actors, receives a solidarity quilt from Alex Neve, Director of AI Canada, during the Human Rights Day event in Bogotá, Colombia. ©AI

have been deliberately turned into targets for armed attack by some state actors and paramilitary groups, thereby generating a climate of accusation and hostility, threats and attacks that have cost valuable lives, driven people into exile and forced numerous organizations to partially or completely stop their work. For the same reason but from the opposite direction, social activists and leaders have also undoubtedly suffered threats and attacks from guerrilla groups who do not accept the assertions of independence made by social organizations. (...)

“Mr President, we note the statement you made on 6 May last during the debate organized by Amnesty International and the Colombian Commission of Jurists between several of the presidential candidates:

"Tonight during these few minutes I would like to focus on the issue of democratic security and I am going to refer you to the

same speech I have been making on all platforms throughout Colombia. Why democratic security? Because security has to be for everyone, to protect the human rights defender, the trade unionist, the teacher, the journalist, the businessman so that he is not kidnapped, the peasant so that he is not displaced. I say democratic security in order to differentiate it from currents that swept through Latin America in the past, for example, the doctrine of national security, a concept of security based on discrimination, a concept of security used to persecute the dissident. The democratic security I am proposing aims to strengthen pluralism".

“We also carefully noted the reference you made in your inauguration speech before Congress on 7 August last when you condemned equally the violence used to attack the State and the violence used to defend it.

“We would like to think that the invitation you made to the United Nations and NGOs to be involved in the country on an ongoing basis and to sustain a *“fraternal and creative dialogue and that every day we will listen to each other”* forms a genuine part of your government's agenda and extends also to national organizations. We would like to believe that your government could commit itself to providing those who join in the debate the certainty that state force will not be used to silence dissidents and that they will be granted the guarantees they require to express their counter arguments and criticisms.

“Mr President, the country and you yourself are well aware of the dramatic number of threats and attacks that have been perpetrated against social leaders and human rights defenders. The way policies adopted by previous administrations to address this problem evolved and what their limitations were are also known, as is the active role played by our organizations in trying to bring about the political will on the part of the authorities to adopt appropriate decisions that would secure and protect the work to promote and defend human rights in their entirety, including legitimate social protest action.

“Various inter-governmental bodies within the international and regional human rights systems who have been monitoring developments in state policy regarding guarantees for the work of human rights defenders and social leaders have made public their concerns regarding the grave situation the

¹ A phrase used in the presentation you gave as a presidential candidate in the debate organized by Amnesty International on 6 May 2002.

latter are facing and have put forward specific recommendations for resolving it.

“The recommendations make the following main points: a) The legitimacy of social and human rights organizations should be recognized at the highest level of government and civilian and military officials should be ordered to stop making statements that weaken that legitimacy and commanded to obey that order and ensure that it is obeyed by others; b) the fundamental principles and procedures regarding intelligence-gathering targetted at human rights defenders should be reviewed and a procedure should be established whereby those concerned can have access to the intelligence gathered about them, together with a mechanism that would allow independent examination of such activities by the civilian authorities; c) serious, impartial and effective criminal investigations should be undertaken into incidents of violence against human rights workers and those who carry them out should be punished, as a fundamental means of preventing

the recurrence of violent incidents; d) all necessary measures, including the removal from service of the agents involved, should be adopted to detect, correct and punish any indication that the armed forces, police or any other state security body is still actively supporting or passively tolerating paramilitary groups in any way; e) the Interior Ministry’s Protection Program should be strengthened by taking into account the recommendations made in the external independent evaluation that was recently carried out; f) a high-level mechanism should be set up to facilitate discussion and the monitoring of government measures that can put an end to the factors resulting in the perpetration of threats and attacks on defenders and create a climate in which the defence of human rights can be freely exercised.

“Given the urgency of the concerns expressed in this letter and bearing in mind what you have said regarding your willingness to have a free-flowing dialogue on human rights and to provide guarantees for the safety of defenders and social leaders,

we would propose, Mr President, that you urgently call a meeting, to be chaired by yourself and involving the human rights organizations who have signed this letter, in order to discuss your government’s human rights policies, with particular reference to the protection of defenders and social leaders and the creation of a high-level mechanism to monitor the debates and measures that might emerge from it.

“Given the nature of the issues to be discussed and the various responsibilities of different state bodies with regard to these matters, we would propose that the following authorities be invited: the Vice-President, the Minister of Defence, the Interior Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the High Commissioner for Peace, the Attorney-General, the Procurator-General and the Ombudsman.”

For more information on Amnesty International’s campaigning on Colombia see http://web.amnesty.org/web/content.nsf/pages/gbr_colombia.

BRAZIL: Human rights defenders under attack in Espírito Santo

In September 2002, Amnesty International delegates met with threatened human rights defenders in the state of Espírito Santo in Brazil during a visit to assess the mechanisms put in place by the federal authorities to tackle mass killings, organised crime and impunity in the state.

Systematic human rights abuses have taken place over many years in Espírito Santo, amidst high levels of corruption which

permeate the executive and the legislative powers in the state. Many of the killings, violence and corruption have been linked to the police organization *Scuderie Detetive le Cocq* (SDLC), and to powerful economic and political groups in the state. Failure by the authorities to disarm and dismantle *Scuderie* or successfully prosecute security force agents linked to it for human rights violations, suggests that the organization operates

with official sponsorship at the highest levels.

The state police and judicial authorities in Brazil are responsible for investigating and punishing state officials responsible for human rights violations. Their long term failure to do so contributed to the climate of institutionalised impunity that exists there. This in turn lead to the unprecedented step of the Federal Ministry of Justice

recommending that the federal government intervene, taking on the responsibility for governing the state.

The 1997 federal congressional inquiry into drug trafficking presented indictments against people in positions of power in Espírito Santo, including the president of the state legislative assembly, high ranking judges, and powerful members of the police, for various crimes ranging from homicide to tax evasion. Three years after the 1999 publication of these findings, no state police or state judicial investigation has been initiated on the basis of this information. A long standing federal judicial investigation into the legal status of SDLC, which presently is legally constituted as a police benevolent fund, has been waiting for a ruling from the federal judge of Espírito Santo for over two years following accusations of “death squad” activity.

Human rights defenders in Espírito Santo, particularly members of the bar association and state council for human rights, have campaigned for many years against killings, corruption and impunity in Espírito Santo. Several have been killed and many threatened.

On 15 April 2002, the fight against impunity in Espírito Santo claimed another victim. Though reported to have had involvement with SDLC local lawyer Marcelo Denadai provided extensive information to police and federal investigations into the criminal activities of SDLC. Denadai was shot dead near Vitória, the state capital, just before he was able to reveal further evidence on



Agesandro da Costa Pereira, president of the Espírito Santo section of the *Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil (OAB)*, Brazilian Lawyer's Association. ©AI

political corruption in Espírito Santo.

Following the killing of Marcelo Denadai, the Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Council was convened in Vitória, the capital of Espírito Santo. The Human Rights Council underlined the fundamental failures of the state authorities to investigate the systematic human rights abuses and the high levels of corruption and recommended federal intervention. However, following a meeting with the President of the Republic, Federal Attorney General, Geraldo Brindeiro decided that he would no longer support the judicial process necessary to ensure its implementation. This decision prompted the Justice Minister, the head of the Federal Police, and numerous other federal officials to resign.

The President's and the Federal Attorney General's determination to overrule the recommendation of the Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Council was

interpreted by some as a message of support for those responsible for the litany of unpunished abuses and killings in the state. Very soon, the campaign of terror and intimidation against those fighting impunity in the state was stepped up. On 25 July 2002, a bomb exploded in the offices of the *Ordem dos Advogados Brasileiros (OAB)*, Brazilian Lawyers' Association, in Vitória. At the time of the explosion, which fortunately led to no injuries or deaths, over 130 lawyers and functionaries were in the building.

Instead of direct federal intervention the President and the new Minister of Justice set up a Special Mission to investigate organized crime in Espírito Santo. The task force, which is made up of federal prosecutors and federal police officers, is mandated to investigate organized crime and protect those at risk.

However, there were two principal concerns raised by the human rights community, namely the short period for which the Special Mission was mandated – only 90 days – and the continued role of the state judiciary in the prosecution of any cases resulting from the investigation. Groups have urged the federal government to ensure that the presence of the Special Mission be maintained, and security provided for all those at risk, until those behind the web of organised crime and human rights violations in the state are brought to justice. There has also been a call to ensure that conditions are provided to guarantee the independence of the judiciary.

During the process of federal intervention in the state of

Espírito Santo many witnesses, human rights activists, prosecutors and others who collaborate with investigations are exposed to threats of reprisals. Two scenarios may intensify this threat: progress on investigations against state authorities and the withdrawal of the Special Mission and/or international attention on the situation of Espírito Santo. The long history of harassment and attacks against human rights activists in the state of Espírito Santo suggest that the Brazilian government should take extra steps, in addition to the police protection, to ensure their protection at this crucial time. In this context, Amnesty International supports the idea to establish a mechanism within the Ministry of Justice charged with developing policies for the

application of the principles of the United Nation's Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This mechanism should address as a matter of urgency the situation of human rights defenders in Espírito Santo.

Although the Ministry of Justice appears to be committed to continuing with the Special Mission in Espírito Santo, it is not possible to predict the degree of commitment the future Brazilian Government or State Government may pay to this issue. Taking into account these factors, there is concern that political attention will not be focused on Espírito Santo. Thus the new federal

government may restrict or curb the mandate of federal intervention in the state, or may not commit sufficient political will, financial or human resources to ensure the effective continuation of the current efforts of the Special Mission. However, it must be said that the elections both at state and federal level seem to indicate that the political tide may be changing, with an important change in the balance of state power offering hope for the future.

Meanwhile the people of Espírito Santo continue to be trapped between the violence of criminal gangs that often operate with the knowledge or complicity of state agents, and state institutions that have consistently failed to protect them.

II Latin American and Caribbean Consultation on Human Rights Defenders

On July 23 – 25 2002, the Second Latin American and Caribbean Consultation on Human Rights Defenders was held in Guatemala City. The first Consultation had been held in Mexico City in June 2001, and had presented an opportunity for human rights defenders from all over Latin America to brief the newly appointed Special Representative to the Secretary General of the United Nations on Human Rights Defenders regarding the situation facing defenders in their countries. It was decided that the second Consultation would be held in Guatemala City in order to show support for Guatemalan human rights defenders who, over the past two years, have been subjected to a dramatic increase in threats, attacks and



Participants in the II Latin American and Caribbean Consultation on Human Rights Defenders. ©AI

intimidation. The Second Consultation coincided with the visit to Guatemala of the Human Rights Defenders Unit of the

Inter-American Human Rights Commission, the first in situ to be carried out by this newly created body. The Consultation

discussed the protection of human rights defenders at the international, regional and local levels. A third Consultation is planned for the end of 2003. The following is an abridged version of the press release issued by the Second Consultation on Human Rights Defenders.

“Over 40 human rights defenders from 18 countries in the Americas, representing hundreds of human rights non-governmental organizations, jointly with human rights defenders from Europe and Africa, met in Guatemala City for the II Latin American and Caribbean Consultation on Human Rights Defenders, to identify and analyze the new challenges and dangers faced by human rights defenders in the continent and to review an agenda for protection, jointly with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its newly established Special Unit for Human Rights Defenders as well as with the recently created mandate of the Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. As acknowledged by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, “for their involvement in the struggle for human rights, human rights defenders are often the first victims of human rights violations perpetrated by State officials or non State entities”.

There is dramatic truth about these words in our region, where the situation has dangerously deteriorated over the last year: according to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on Human Rights Defenders over 90% of the killings of human rights

defenders in the world occurred in the Americas. (...)

“In Guatemala, threats, attacks and homicides of human rights defenders, often disguised or concealed as acts of “common crime”, have increased systematically over the last year, with total impunity. Indeed, the Consultation took place in Guatemala in solidarity with the Guatemalan human rights movement.

“In Colombia, the situation is atrocious: between January and June this year 95 trade-unionists were murdered for their activism, double those killed during the same period last year. The paramilitary groups and State officials have been responsible for the majority of the attacks however we also observed with utmost concern an increase in the number of attacks against defenders by members of armed opposition groups. The regionalization of the Colombian conflict, fuelled by the so-called “Plan Colombia”- promoted by that country and approved by the U.S. Congress- is leading to an alarming increase of threats and attacks against defenders in Ecuador.

“In Brazil the situation has also worsened, fuelled, in some cases, by the influence of organized crime over State institutions, such as the case of Espírito Santo State, where several social activists have been recently murdered. In Argentina and Paraguay, the criminalization of social protest led to the killings of dozens of activists protesting against the state of siege recently imposed on those countries. In Venezuela, where human rights activists face increasing difficulties in carrying their work,

a popular up-rise succeeded in preventing the first *coup d'etat* registered in the region since 1990, with a high toll of social activists killed and wounded.

“In Mexico the repression against human rights defenders continued, despite the official rhetoric to the contrary. In Haiti the safety of human rights defenders is increasingly endangered and in Jamaica, attacks against activists denouncing the abuses of police forces have also increased. We also noted with great concern the growing restraint of the rights of human rights defenders in Cuba, as exemplified by the prohibition to leave the country of a human rights defender invited to this meeting, who was able to participate in last year's Consultation.

“We noted with grave concern that throughout the region there is a growing tendency towards militarization as a response to social and political unrest: in particular we are deeply concerned about the hemispherical impact of “anti-terrorist” policies and measures, following the grave attacks of 11 September 2001. Throughout the region doctrines and practices, promoted by the United States, have begun to re-emerge, which tend to identify social activists with the “internal enemy”, leading to their public disqualification as “de-stabilizers, insubordinates, delinquents or defenders of delinquents”.

“This serious situation calls into question the commitment by States in our region towards the protection and promotion of human rights and enhances the risks for the survival of our fragile democracies, since democracy

cannot be consolidated without a strong and unrestricted human rights movement, of which human rights defenders are an essential and indispensable component.

“It is therefore urgent to pay greater attention and to respond effectively to this grave situation as well as ensuring full guarantees for the human rights movement and the security of defenders and their work in the hemisphere.

“We strongly welcome the work carried out by Ms. Hina Jilani, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on Human Rights Defenders, as well as the commitment and interest of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in attending this Consultation to help improve the protection of human rights defenders in the region and we urge all American States to follow their example and accomplish their obligations on this matter.



The offices of the *Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala (Conadehgua)*, National Human Rights Coordination were raided on 21 July 2002, just days before the II Consultation on Human Rights Defenders took place in Guatemala City. Computer equipment, telephones and fax machines were stolen, along with files containing important information on their human rights work.

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“Finally, the II Consultation wishes to take the opportunity of the visit of Pope John Paul II to

Guatemala to recall the martyrdom, attacks and threats suffered in this and in other countries of the region by bishops, priests and laics of the Catholic Church and by all other human rights defenders, for their commitment to peace and human rights, strongly recalling the urgent need for justice and the effective protection of all human rights defenders.”

Steering Committee of the II Latin American and Caribbean Consultation on Human Rights Defenders: *Movimiento Nacional de Derechos Humanos*, Guatemala; *Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos “Todos los Derechos para Todos”*, Mexico; *Comité Ad-Hoc para Defensores*, Colombia; *Amnesty International*, and the *Human Rights Defenders Office, International Service for Human Rights*, Switzerland.

Guatemala, July 25, 2002

**If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of the II Latin American and Caribbean Consultation on Human Rights Defenders please contact:
Americas Human Rights Defenders Program, Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK.
E-mail: tmackenz@amnesty.org**

ARGENTINA: Situation of human rights defenders presented to Inter-American Human Rights Commission

The protection of human rights defenders was once again raised as a key issue in the Inter-American Human Rights Commission which held hearings in Washington from 14 – 19 October 2002. Special attention was given to the deteriorating situation of human rights defenders in Argentina. The following are extracts of a report presented by Argentinean human rights organizations to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in which they give examples of some attacks and intimidation suffered by Argentinean defenders in recent months.

“(...)As is already public knowledge, social protests have recently intensified in our country in the form of pickets, marches, neighbourhood assemblies, etc., as indeed has institutional repression by the state, leaving in its wake a tragic trail of illegal detentions, injuries and deaths. In the context of this social conflict, the number of attacks on human rights defenders, and social leaders and organizations continues to rise, and is extremely worrying given the important role these people play in defending and protecting the fundamental rights and liberties of those citizens carrying out acts of civil protest. (...)”

“ ATTACKS AGAINST ESTELA BARNES DE CARLOTTO

In the early hours of Friday 20 September, several unidentified individuals fired shots at Estela Carlotto’s home, situated in Ciudad de La Plata, capital of the

Buenos Aires province, damaging both the façade and interior of the house. Estela Carlotto is president of the *Asociación Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, the Association of Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an organization dedicated to finding and returning to their families all children kidnapped during the last military dictatorship.

“The numerous shots fired at Estela Carlotto’s home clearly show that the intention of the attackers was not to provoke material damage, but rather to hit the people inside the house at the time. In addition, those investigating the case have revealed that the bullets used were of the same type used by the security forces, and according to the victim, -who has detailed knowledge relating to the killing of her daughter- the bullets were also of the same type used to kill her daughter.

“This attack occurred a day after the Comisión Provincial por la Memoria, Provincial Remembrance Commission, of which Estela Carlotto is President, presented to the Buenos Aires Supreme Court a document analysing the work of the Buenos Aires Provincial Police in recent years. This document concludes that the Buenos Aires security forces continue to use the same horrific methods as were used in Argentina during the period of state terrorism.

“The Minister of Security for Buenos Aires, Juan Pablo Cafiero, stated that the attack

against Estela Carlotto was not a robbery attempt, but a very serious attack, which could have been related to the document presented days before to the Buenos Aires Supreme Court. (...)

“THREATS AGAINST CLAUDIO PANDOLFI, CORREPI LAWYER

Claudio Pandolfi works as a lawyer at the *Coordinadora Contra la Represión Policial e Institucional (CORREPI)*, the Association Against Police and Institutional Repression, an organization dedicated to defending and protecting the fundamental rights and liberties of victims of illegal acts carried out by state agents.

“CORREPI have been subjected to many threats and intimidation because of their work to defend and protect human rights. For example, after carrying out work to identify those responsible for the repression which took place on 26 June 2002, Claudio Pandolfi and his family received death threats on their telephone answering machine, in which the caller stated "we know which hole you are hiding in, we are going to kill you like a dog", and expressed their support for the police repression carried out by Superintendent Franchiotti, which lead to two deaths, many injuries and hundreds of arrests. The independent photographer who took photos of repression in the Avellaneda Station, and identified the police officers responsible for the deaths of two protesters, has also received threats.

“THREATS AGAINST ADRIANA CALVO AND CARLOS LORDKIPANIDSE.

Adriana Calvo and Carlos Lordkipanidse are members of the Asociación de Ex Detenidos Desaparecidos, the Association of Ex Detained Disappeared. The organization is made up of survivors of the various concentration camps which operated in Argentina during the last military dictatorship, and aims to secure justice for the mass human rights violations perpetrated during this period, and to construct collective memory, so that the horror of the state terrorism is not forgotten by society.

“Adriana Calvo and Carlos Lordkipanidse were subjected to anonymous threats and intimidation, after testifying against a group of oppressors and torturers undergoing legal proceedings. Both testified in the ongoing case of the torture and disappearance of 22 members of the Montoneros Movement in 1980. Around 40 ex-oppressors, army and police officers are being detained in relation to this trial, including ex-dictator Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri.

“Between 12 and 22 July 2002, Adriana Calvo and Carlos

Lordkipanidse submitted an article in the Daily newspaper *Página/12*, denouncing repression carried out during the state terrorism, and implicating police officers who still remain in office today. As a consequence of this article, they suffered renewed anonymous death threats and intimidation. (...)

“THREATS AND INTIMIDATION AGAINST NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSEMBLIES

A number of people participating in various neighbourhood assemblies have also been subjected to harassment and intimidation as a result of their work.

“For example, on 12, 13 and 14 July 2002, members of the neighbourhood assembly from Villa Santa Rita and Villa Mitre, in the city of Buenos Aires, received repeated telephone threats during which callers said they were "going to kill everyone". In several cases, the callers referred to members of the neighbourhood assembly by their surnames.

“In addition, members of the neighbourhood assembly in Sarandí, in the province of Buenos Aires, reported that each

time they met they were spied on from a red Ford Falcon car license number VYE 523. When they used the license plate to ascertain the owner of the car, they discovered it was property of the Argentinean Federal Police. These events reveal that Argentinean State security forces are carrying out intelligence operations related to neighbourhood assemblies, causing understandable fear among the members of these assemblies. (...)

“The above cases are merely an example of the repeated attacks, threats and harassment suffered by human rights defenders and activists in Argentina. (...)

“For this reason, as human rights organizations and social organizations committed to defending fundamental human rights, we call upon the Argentinean authorities to investigate, prosecute and bring to justice those responsible for these attacks. We also respectfully ask the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to intervene in this matter, and in particular to consider the possibility of carrying out an in-situ visit to Argentina.”

NEWS

COLOMBIA: First anniversary of the killing of Yolanda Cerón

On 19 September 2001 Yolanda Cerón was shot eight times as she crossed Nariño Park in the centre of Tumaco, the city where she lived and worked. She was taken to hospital but died soon after arriving. Yolanda Cerón had been

a dedicated defender of human rights with the Catholic church's organization, *Pastoral Social* for many years. She directed the human rights program of *Pastoral Social* and was known internationally for her commitment, particularly to promoting the rights of indigenous and black

communities in Tumaco. One year on, very little progress appears to have been made in the investigation into Yolanda Cerón's death. Despite an apparent increase in the arrest of paramilitaries, paramilitary activity continues virtually unabated in the region. *Pastoral Social* continues to work in

Tumaco, but has adopted a low profile in order to ensure the safety of its members. From 16 to 22 September 2002, the people of Tumaco celebrated their annual 'Peace Week', this time without the leadership of Yolanda Cerón. On 13 September, a plaque in Yolanda's memory was unveiled in the park where she was killed.

MEXICO: A year on from the killing of Digna Ochoa

19 October 2002 was the first anniversary of the killing of human rights lawyer, Digna Ochoa y Plácido in Mexico City. The case has had a very high profile in Mexico over the last year and the investigation has been closely followed by the press. However, in spite of this interest very little real progress has been made.

A new prosecutor, Margarita Guerra, was assigned to the case in August and has stated her intention to implement recommendations made by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (following the visit, earlier this year, of independent expert Pedro Díaz), and allow their international forensic experts to participate in the investigation. This step has not yet been taken.

TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

COLOMBIA: CSPP members threatened

On 15 September Agustín Jiménez, president of the non-governmental human rights organization *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos* (CSPP), Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee, was at a baseball game in Bogotá when he received a call on his mobile. When he asked the caller to identify himself, the caller replied that he was with Flor, waiting to bury Agustín. At the time of the call Flor Munera, treasurer of the organization was in fact in the CSPP office. In the past, both Flor Munera and Agustín Jiménez have been followed and harassed by individuals who have later been identified as participants in attacks against trade unionists and human rights defenders. The seriousness of threats that members of the CSPP have received in the past has prompted the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to urge the

Colombian government for special protection measures for all CSPP members.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals in Spanish or your own language:

- urging the Colombian authorities to take immediate and effective action to protect Agustín Jiménez Cuello and Flor Munera and other members of the *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos* (CSPP) and to ensure that members of the CSPP can carry out their legitimate and important work for the defence of human rights in safety;
- urging the authorities to initiate a permanent and meaningful dialogue with defenders to address protection issues presented in a letter to them on behalf of Colombian NGOs on 9 September 2002;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with

repeated United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Colombia

Presidente de la República de Colombia

Dr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: +57 1 342 0592

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Ministro del Interior y de Justicia

Dr. Fernando Londoño Hoyos

Palacio Echeverry

Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: +57 1 566 4573

Salutation: Estimado Ministro/Dear Minister

GUATEMALA: CONAVIGUA member tortured and murdered

Manuel García de la Cruz left his home in the community of Chuchuca in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala on the night of 6 September, and travelled in the direction of the town of Joyabaj to buy corn. However, he never returned and members of his community later found his tortured body. He had been decapitated and his ears, nose and eyes cut out. The victim was an active supporter of the Guatemalan indigenous human rights organization, *Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala* (CONAVIGUA), National Coordination of Guatemala widows,, participating in training courses and other activities aimed at promoting the development of his community. He had been involved in all the exhumations and re-burials carried out by CONAVIGUA in the area, accompanying the widows to court for the necessary legal procedures. CONAVIGUA considers that his brutal torture and murder are intended as a clear threat to its members and their families in the community because of their work for reconciliation, peace and justice in Guatemala. The organization fears that local civil patrollers, who served as civilian auxiliaries to the military during Guatemala's long-term civil conflict which



Manuel García de la Cruz. ©AI

shook the country for a period of over thirty years, wish to cover up the atrocities in which they were involved and may have been involved in his torture and killing. In addition, television reporters who covered the CONAVIGUA press conference on 11 September denouncing Manuel García=s murder were attacked by unknown individuals and their camera equipment stolen.

RECOMMENDED

ACTION: Please send appeals in Spanish, English or your own language:

- expressing grave concern at the torture and murder of Manuel García de la Cruz;

- insisting that this crime must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice if the international community, including the Consultative Group of major donor countries, is to have any faith that the Guatemalan Peace Accords are to be truly implemented and the country returned to rule of law;

- calling on the authorities to assure the protection of all members of CONAVIGUA as they carry out their lawful human rights work, including those in the Zacualpa and Joyabaj areas of El Quiché department.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala

6a. Avenida AA@ 4-41, Zona 1,
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: (502) 239 0090

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President

Vice-President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Juan Francisco Reyes López
Vicepresidente de la República de Guatemala

6a. Avenida AA@ 4-18, Zona 1,
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 239 0090

Salutation: Señor Vice-presidente/Dear Vice-President

This publication is produced by the Program to Promote the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Latin America, established by Amnesty International in May 1997 to follow-up the Defenders Conference (Bogotá, Colombia, May 1996). Please distribute this bulletin as widely as possible. For more information and to join the Program=s Defenders Network, write to: Americas

*Human Rights Defenders Program, International Secretariat, Amnesty International,
1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom. (tel: +44 20 7413 5952 / 5537; e-mail: amnestyis@amnesty.org)*