

PUBLIC

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19 March 2008

UA 77/08 Fear for safety/ Death threats

COLOMBIA **Members of organizations involved in demonstrations organized by the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (*Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado*, MOVICE)**

On 6 March, a coalition of human rights organizations, trade unions, indigenous groups and other organizations participated in a series of demonstrations in Colombia and around the world. The demonstrations condemned human rights violations committed by the Colombian security forces and army-backed paramilitary groups. Those who belong to organizations believed to have been involved in the demonstration have been threatened or killed, both before and since the march.

On 11 March a number of organizations, many of which participated in the 6 March events, received a death threat via email, purportedly from the paramilitary Metropolitan Front of the Black Eagles in Bogotá (*Aguilas Negras – Bloque Metropolitano de Bogotá*). The threat accused the organizations of being "guerrillas" and named them as "military targets". The email said: "You used the march on 6 March this year to bring us down further and turn people against us, we will begin to kill you one by one, we mean business, and we won't leave any loose ends" (*Ustedes utilizaron dicha marcha del 06 de marzo del presente presente (sic.) año para undirnos (sic.) mas y poner la gente en contra nuestra, comenzaremos a matarlos uno por uno. Vamos a ser implacables no dejaremos cabo suelto*). It goes on to say "Watch out you sons-of-bitches, your days are numbered" (*Ojo hijos de perra que sus días estan contados*). The threat included photographs taken of one of the marches and said "we will start to disappear left-wing leaders such as..." (*Comenzaremos a desaparecer líderes y dirigentes de izquierda como.....*). It gives a list of 28 individuals – 18 of whom are women and many of whom belong to human rights, indigenous and other organizations which participated in the march – that they say they plan to abduct. The threat also included the names of several human rights organizations, trade unions, and other groups.

A number of trade unionists and human rights activists, some of whom were closely involved in organizing events or whose organizations participated in them, were killed or threatened just before or soon after 6 March. On 4 March, Carmen Cecilia Carvajal, a member of the trade union ASINORT was killed in Ocaña, Norte del Santander Department. On 8 March, Leonidas Gómez, of the UNEB banking union, was found dead in his apartment in Bogotá. On 7 March, Gildardo Antonio Gómez of the teachers' union ADIDA, was killed in Medellín. On 12 March, the body of Carlos Burbano, a leader from the health union ANTHOC and organizer of the march in southern Colombia, was found dead in San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá department.

Adriana González, a member of the human rights group CPDH and organizer of the march in Pereira, Risaralda Department, survived an apparent attempt on her life when gunmen fired on her house on 29 February. Iván Cepeda, a leading member of the coalition group, the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (*Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado*, MOVICE) and one of the main organizers of the March demonstration also received email death threats before and after the march.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 6 March, the demonstrations organized by MOVICE took place in more than 24 locations in Colombia, and in a further 70 cities in 60 other countries.

On 4 February 2008, demonstrations also took place in Colombia and around the world to protest against human rights abuses committed by the guerrilla group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

(*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC). On 11 February, presidential adviser José Obdulio Gaviria suggested that the 6 March demonstration was being organized by the FARC. On 14 March, the Vice-minister of the Interior issued a statement rejecting the death threats sent to various organizations on 11 March.

Human rights organizations, trade unions and other social organizations have often been labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the government officials, as well as by the security forces and paramilitaries. Such accusations have often been followed by threats or attacks against human rights activists.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of members of human rights groups, trade unions, indigenous and other organizations following the 6 March demonstrations;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all measures deemed appropriate by the individuals and organizations named in the threat issued on 11 March, are taken to guarantee their safety;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the killings of social activists and the death threat issued on 11 March, the results of which should be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for 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 of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

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

Fax: +57 1 337 5890 / 342 0592

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

Vice-President of the Republic

Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón

Vicepresidencia, Carrera 8A No 7-27, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 565 7682 (ask for fax tone: me da tono de fax por favor)

Salutation: Dear Vice-president Santos/Estimado Sr. Vicepresidente Santos

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:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr. Fernando Araújo Perdomo

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

Calle 10 No 5-51, Palacio de San Carlos, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 562 7822

Human Rights organization

Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'

Edificio Avianca: calle 16 No. 6-66 Piso 25 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 30 April 2008.