

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/012/2003

7 February 2003

Further Information on UA 38/01 (AMR 23/017/2001, 9 February 2001) and follow-ups (AMR 23/019/2001, 14 February 2001, and AMR 23/133/2002, 20 November 2002) - Fear for Safety /Death Threats

COLOMBIA Human rights activists with the *Organización Femenina Popular*, (OFP), Popular Women's Organization in the Cantagallo municipality, department of Bolivar
Jackeline Rojas (f)
New name: Cleotilde Morón (f)

Amnesty International continues to be concerned for the safety of human rights activists of the *Organización Femenina Popular*, (OFP), Popular Women's Organization in the Cantagallo municipality, department of Bolivar following recent threats by army-backed paramilitaries.

On 5 February, a meeting in the offices of the OFP in Cantagallo to discuss paramilitary threats against the OFP was interrupted by armed men believed to be members of an army-backed paramilitary group. Despite the presence of representatives of the *Defensoría Regional del Pueblo*, Regional National Advocate for the People, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the mayor's office, other non-governmental human rights organizations, the church and the OFP, the armed intruders threatened that they would return to burn down the offices of the OFP in Cantagallo and would kill any OFP leaders that remained in the offices.

The OFP has reportedly informed the Director of the *Programa Presidencial para la Promoción, Respeto y Garantía de los Derechos Humanos*, Presidential Program for the Promotion, Respect and Guarantee of Human Rights about this incident. However, despite the fact that Cantagallo has both a police and army presence, the authorities have taken no decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area or to protect the OFP.

Human rights activists with the OFP in the departments of Bolivar and Santander have been threatened repeatedly in the past (see AMR 23/011/2002, 28 January 2002; and UA 144/02, AMR 23/055/2002, 13 May 2002). The former coordinator of the OFP group in Cantagallo resigned from her post in December 2002 due to the constant threats and pressure from paramilitary groups for her to do so. Her replacement, Cleotilde Morón was reportedly approached two days after taking up the post by a paramilitary commander, who claimed he knew she was the new coordinator of the OFP group in Cantagallo and that this would cause her problems.

The threats issued by the paramilitaries are the latest in a long campaign of intimidation of human rights activists in the area. Jackeline Rojas, who oversees the work of the OFP in the Cantagallo area, was declared a "military target" in November 2002 by army-backed paramilitaries who reportedly view the OFP as a threat to their control over the area. Jackeline Rojas continues to oversee the work of the OFP in the Cantagallo area. Amnesty International remains concerned for her safety.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The OFP has been working to promote women's human rights in Barrancabermeja, department of Santander and surrounding areas including the municipality of Cantagallo for more than 30 years. They refuse to cooperate with army-backed paramilitary groups, and have therefore faced continual threats and harassment.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Cleotilde Morón and other human rights activists with the *Organización Femenina Popular*, (OFP), Popular Women's Organization in Cantagallo, Bolívar department following the most recent threats, issued on 5 February;
- calling on the Colombian authorities to investigate these threats fully and bring to justice those responsible;
- urging the Colombian authorities to take steps, deemed appropriate by those under threat, to guarantee the safety of human rights activists with the OFP, so that they can carry out their legitimate human rights work without fear of reprisal;
- calling on the Colombian government to initiate an ongoing and meaningful dialogue with human rights defenders to address issues of their protection and the prevention of attacks against them;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations to human rights defenders, as laid out in the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Human Rights Defenders in the Americas resolution of the Organization of American States and in repeated recommendations made to them by the United Nations;
- expressing concern at the continued large-scale presence of army-backed paramilitary forces in Cantagallo Municipality and surrounding areas despite the heavy military presence in the area;
- calling for immediate decisive action to confront and dismantle these groups in line with repeated UN recommendations and governmental commitments.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No.7-26
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram: Presidente de la República,
Bogotá, Colombia**
Fax: + 57 1 342 0592
**Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe /
Dear President Uribe**

National Advocate for the people

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,
Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,
Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301,
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram: Defensor del Pueblo, Bogotá,
Colombia**
Fax: + 57 1 640 0491
**Salutation: Estimado Sr. Cifuentes Muñoz /
Dear Mr. Cifuentes Muñoz**

Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia

Vicepresidente de la República de Colombia
Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón
Vicepresidencia
Carrera 8A No 5-57
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram: Vice-Presidente Bell, Bogotá,
Colombia**
Fax: + 57 1 334 1138
**Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr.
Vicepresidente/ Dear Vice-President**

COPIES TO:

Grassroots women's organization

Organización Femenina Popular
Cra 22 No 52B – 36
Barrancabermeja, Santander, 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 21 March 2003.