

# URGENT ACTION

## FAMILY TARGETED BY PARAMILITARIES

**A member of a family previously targeted by paramilitaries in northern Colombia has survived an attempt on his life. His life, and the lives of his relatives, are at risk.**

On 11 March, **Hernando José Verbel Ocón** drove his motorbike from the central square of San Onofre Municipality, Sucre Department, to a football pitch in the municipality. Two men approached him when he reached the pitch. One of them got on the back of his motorbike and pointed a gun at him. The other man, identified by eyewitnesses as a local resident currently serving with Colombia's Marine Infantry (*Infantería de Marina*), told Hernando José Verbel Ocón that he should take the armed man wherever he ordered. When they reached the edge of a local ranch, the gunman ordered Hernando José Verbel Ocón off the motorcycle, saying, "Turn off and get down. I am going to shoot you" (*apaga y bájate que te voy a explotar*) and he pointed the gun at his victim's throat. At that moment a couple passing by told the gunman to stop: "What are you doing? Calm down. Calm down and don't shoot him" (*que vas a hacer, cálmate, cálmate no lo explotes*). The gunman then ran off. Hernando José Verbel Ocón reported this attempt on his life to the judicial and investigative police (SIJIN).

On 23 March 2011, Eder Verbel Rocha, the father of Hernando José Verbel Ocón, was killed by paramilitaries, and in January 2012, Eder Verbel Rocha's brother, who witnessed the killing, received death threats. The Verbel Rocha family, who are members of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (*Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas e Crímenes de Estado*, MOVICE), has been campaigning against impunity and human rights violations committed by paramilitaries in Sucre Department. The family is also facing threats apparently in an effort to force them to leave the land they own in the area.

### Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Express concern for the safety of Hernando José Verbel Ocón, his family, and other members of MOVICE, and urge the authorities to guarantee their safety in strict accordance with their wishes;
- Call on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into the attack against Hernando José Verbel Ocón and previous killings and attacks on the Verbel Rocha family, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Urge the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 APRIL 2012 TO:

#### President

Señor Juan Manuel Santos  
 Presidente de la República de Colombia  
 Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26,  
 Bogotá,  
 Colombia  
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631

Salutation: **Dear President Santos/  
 Excmo. Sr. Presidente Santos**

#### Director of the National Protection Unit of the Ministry of Interior

Sr. Andrés Villamizar  
 Unidad Nacional de Protección  
 Ministerio del Interior  
 Carrera 9a. No. 14-10,  
 Bogotá, Colombia

Email:  
 andres.villamizar@mininterior.gov.co

Salutation: **Dear Mr Villamizar  
 /Estimado Sr. Villamizar**

#### And copies to:

#### NGO

Movice  
 Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de  
 Crímenes de Estado  
 Calle 38 No 28 A 30  
 Barrio Bogotá  
 Sincelejo,  
 Colombia

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 18/12. Further information:

[www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/003/2012/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/003/2012/en)

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 INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 23 March 2011, brothers Orlando Enrique Verbel Rocha and Eder Verbel Rocha, and the latter's son, were on their way home on a motorcycle after working in their fields in San Onofre Municipality. Shortly before arriving at their home, two armed paramilitaries shot at them, beat them with their rifles and kicked them. Eder Verbel Rocha was fatally wounded. Orlando Enrique Verbel Rocha and the child managed to flee and inform some soldiers of the Marine Infantry (Infantería de Marina) who were nearby. Two paramilitaries who allegedly shot at the brothers and the child have been detained. They remain in detention pending trial. However, further investigations into who ordered these killings have not produced any results.

On 16 January 2012, the adopted daughter of Eder Verbel Roacha was riding on a bicycle in the park of San Onofre Municipality. A man approached her and said that the culprits of her father's death will never be found and made a death threat against Orlando Enrique Verbel Rocha.

MOVICE is a broad coalition of civil society organizations campaigning for truth, justice and reparation for the victims of Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict. The members of MOVICE have documented and exposed many cases of killings and enforced disappearance carried out by the security forces and paramilitary groups in Sucre Department. On 6 March MOVICE organized protest marches with a special appeal for the implementation of an effective and comprehensive process for the restitution and restoration of lands violently seized by all parties to the conflict – the paramilitaries, the security forces and guerrilla groups.

The Verbel Roacha family along with other members of MOVICE Sucre branch participated in the marches. Among those participating were also the peasant farmers of La Europa farm in Ovejas Municipality, Sucre Department. In 1994, 12 peasant farmers were killed and 80 displaced from La Europa farm by paramilitaries. MOVICE Sucre branch has been campaigning for the restitution of the "La Europa" farm. Some peasant farmers have returned and their homes have been repeatedly burnt. According to information received the latest burning of their homes happened on 16 March.

Activists campaigning for justice in cases of human rights abuses and for the return of lands stolen mainly by paramilitary groups over the course of the conflict have been particularly vulnerable to threats and killings in recent years. Most of these attacks are attributed to paramilitary groups. Guerrilla groups have also targeted human rights defenders and other social activists deemed to be a threat to their interests.

Despite government claims that all paramilitaries demobilized in a government-sponsored programme that began in 2003, such groups continue to operate and commit serious human rights violations against human rights defenders and other civilians. This is sometimes in collusion with the security forces, or with their consent.

Name: Hernando José Verbel Ocón  
Gender m/f: Male

Further information on UA: 18/12 Index: AMR 23/014/2012 Issue Date: 19 March 2012