

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 89/95      "Disappearance"

11 April 1995

**COLOMBIA** Wilson José CÁCERES GONZÁLEZ, aged 44, peasant leader, candidate in  
mayoral elections

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Wilson José Cáceres González who was last seen travelling by motorcycle on 6 April 1995. Wilson José Cáceres is mayoral candidate for the *Movimiento Campesino Obrero y Popular*, Worker and Popular Peasant Farmer Movement in municipal elections in Sabana de Torres, Department of Santander. He is well-known as a civic and peasant leader and is a founding member of the *Movimiento Cívico de Sabana de Torres*, Civic Movement of Sabana de Torres.

According to reports, Wilson José Cáceres' name appears on a death list which began to circulate towards the end of March 1995. The death list is signed by the *Autodefensas Campesinas de Colombia* (ACC), Peasant Farmer Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, and it includes the names of other peasant farmers living in the villages of Las Lajas, Caño Peruetano, Birmania, La Bahía, La Magdalena and Rosa Blanca.

According to information received by Amnesty International, Wilson José Cáceres González left his home in the municipality of Sabana de Torres at 5.00 am on 6 April 1995 on his white motorcycle travelling in the direction of Alegría farm in the village of Villa de Leiva, 15 minutes' drive from Sabana de Torres.

Wilson José Cáceres González stayed at the farm until 11.00 am, when he went to "El Nariño" farm which belongs to his family and where he works as an administrator, and is 40 minutes away from the Alegría farm. At approximately 5.00 pm, Wilson José Cáceres began his journey home.

According to investigations undertaken by the *Personero Municipal*, Municipal Ombudsman and the *Grupo de Derechos Humanos de Sabana de Torres*, Human Rights Group of Sabana de Torres, Wilson José Cáceres was seen at 5.30pm, travelling towards Sabana de Torres on the Panamerican Highway, opposite Villa Nueva farm in the village of Mata de Platano.

In the course of investigations into his "disappearance", the red cap which Wilson José Cáceres had been wearing when he left home was found in the place where he was last seen.

The "disappearance" comes shortly after the ACC, on 3 April 1995, set up a road block between the villages of Las Lajas and Caño Peruetano, approximately 45 minutes' drive away from Sabana de Torres and 35 minutes from La Gómez Military Base. It was set up by a group of approximately 15 men, two of them hooded, wearing American-style military uniforms and red and black armbands with the letters ACC printed on them. The group stopped and commandeered a bus, leaving the passengers at the checkpoint.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the last few months Amnesty International has received several reports of death threats against civilian inhabitants in the Sabana de Torres region carried out by members of the security forces (see follow-up to UA 324/94, AMR 23/06/95); according to reports received, members of the *Batallón Contraquerriilla Los Guanes*, Los Guanes Counter-insurgency Battalion, particularly are involved in these incidents. There is also intense paramilitary activity in the region and the civilian population has lodged numerous official complaints regarding this. Many of these denunciations refer to the close links between paramilitary groups and the armed forces. Given the tense situation in the municipality of Sabana de Torres, there is much concern for the safety of Wilson José Cáceres and the other peasant farmers named on the list.

Despite repeated government pledges to protect human rights, members of the Colombian security and armed forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Many paramilitary groups have their origins in the civilian "self-defence" squads which the army created in the 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombian armed forces to combat and disband such groups, paramilitary forces have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents, including civic and popular leaders, in many areas of the country and continue to work with the support of the security forces. Illegal paramilitary activity is principally centred on rural areas of guerrilla influence and peasant farmers have often been the target of human rights violations. President Ernesto Samper Pizano has made repeated promises, both during his election campaign and since taking office in August 1994, to improve the human rights situation, including a commitment to dismantle paramilitary forces.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Spanish or in your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of Wilson José Cáceres González and urging an immediate and thorough investigation to establish his whereabouts;
- urging that if he is in detention, that he be humanely treated and allowed access to relatives and to a lawyer; asking that he be immediately charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released;
- expressing concern for the safety of other peasant farmers in the municipality of Sabana de Torres reportedly named on a death list;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the alleged death list, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the government to immediately fulfil its commitment to disband paramilitary forces presently operating as auxiliaries of, or with the complicity of, the armed forces; members of such forces responsible for human rights violations should be brought to justice and links between these forces and the security forces should be thoroughly investigated.

**APPEALS TO**

1) President

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano  
 Presidente de la República  
 Palacio de Nariño  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia**  
**Telexes: 44281 PALP CO**  
**Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939**  
**Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper**

2) Minister of Defence  
 Dr. Fernando Botero Zea  
 Ministro de Defensa Nacional  
 Ministerio de Defensa Nacional  
 Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telegrams:Ministro de Defensa Botero, Bogota, Colombia**  
**Telexes:42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO**  
**Faxes:+ 57 1 288 4906 / 228 1874**  
**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

3) Minister of the Interior  
 Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe  
 Ministro de Gobierno  
 Ministerio de Gobierno  
 Carrera 8a, No.8-09, Piso 7  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telegrams: Ministro de Gobierno Serpa, Bogota, Colombia**  
**Telexes:45406 MINGO CO**  
**Salutation:Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

4) Commander of the Armed Forces  
 General Ramón Emilio Gil Bermúdez  
 Comandante de las Fuerzas Militares  
 Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telegrams: Comandante Fuerzas Militares, Bogota, Colombia**  
**Fax: + 57 1 222 2096**  
**Salutation:Sr. Comandante / Dear Commander**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

Alternative Legal Association  
 MINGA  
 AA 40303  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or with your section office, if sending appeals after 23 May 1995.