

**Public**

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## **Immediate government action now vital for Colombian human rights activists to continue their work**

Human rights activists in the city of Barrancabermeja, Magdalena Medio region, are being threatened and intimidated by paramilitary forces linked to the Colombian army, in an ongoing campaign to drive all human rights defenders from the area.

On 3 January several people thought to belong to the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia, came to the homes of José Guillermo Larios and Iván Madero Vergel in Barrancabermeja threatening them and their families and accusing them of being guerrilla collaborators.

José Guillermo Larios and Iván Madero Vergel are both members of the Barrancabermeja-based *Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (CREDHOS), Regional Human Rights Committee, which has played a vital role in drawing international attention to human rights abuses committed by guerrillas, the armed forces and their paramilitary allies. Several CREDHOS have been killed in the past. In pamphlets circulated at a human rights conference in October 2000, the AUC accused all CREDHOS activists of being "guerrillas" and warning them to "get out".

On the morning of 27 January, two men identifying themselves as members of the AUC paramilitary group came to a womens' community centre (*Casa de la Mujer*) run by the *Organización Femenina Popular* (OFP), Popular Women's Organization, in the Prado-Campestre district of Barrancabermeja. They announced that they had come to take over the centre. When the women refused to give them the keys, the paramilitaries threatened to come back later.

One of the men returned the same day, threatening a female activist and stealing her mobile phone. He reportedly said that the paramilitaries would take the centre by force and "blow the door down and trample over whoever stands in their way".

The renewed threats against CREDHOS and OFP workers coincide with an increased presence of paramilitary forces in the north-eastern districts of Barrancabermeja since December 2000. Despite a heavy security force presence in the area, paramilitary forces have apparently been able to operate unhindered, and are reported to have set up checkpoints and to have killed several people in recent weeks. Although the precise location of these checkpoints have been reported to the security forces, they have taken no action to confront the paramilitaries.

Please write, calling for immediate and effective measures to be taken to guarantee the safety of all human rights defenders in Barrancabermeja.

Send your letters to: Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 no. 7/26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia. Fax: +57 1 336 2109 / 565 8566

Send letters of support to: CREDHOS, Apartado Aéreo 505, Barrancabermeja, Santander, Colombia  
Organización Femenina Popular, Cra 22 No 52B – 36, Barrancabermeja, Santander, Colombia