

URGENT ACTION

SIX COLOMBIANS THREATENED VIA TEXT MESSAGE

Six men in Cauca department, western Colombia, including Afro-descendant and Indigenous community leaders, all received the same threatening SMS (text) message simultaneously on 4 December. Those threatened have been opposing further development of a hydroelectric project in the area where they live and work. Their lives may be at risk.

The six men threatened all received a text message which read: "Son of a bitch, don't decide for the community if they want the resources. You have eight days to leave. The list remains." (*Hp no decidan por la comunida (sic) que si quieren en los recurs (sic) tienen 8 días pasair (sic) sige (sic) la lista*).

The six men (**Licifrey Arara**, **Yair Ortiz** and **Edwar Mina**, members of the La Toma Afro-descendant Community Council, **Arley González**, a independent miner; **Enrique Guetio**, a leader of the Indigenous community in the Cerro Tijeras Reservation, and **Edwar Villegas**, a member of the Trade Union Congress (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores, CUT*) all represent groups affected by a proposal to divert a river to power the Salvajina hydroelectric plant in Cauca. They have been active in a campaign by local communities to oppose the diversion of the river, as well as large-scale gold-mining by multinational corporations in the region. The communities fear that these large scale developments would make it difficult for them to maintain their livelihood and their culture. Some of those threatened have publicized and reported threats and killings that have taken place in the region since the Salvajina hydroelectric plant was first built in the 1980s. A few days before the threat was received, the affected communities had arranged a public meeting. When the men received the threat, this meeting had not yet been publicized. .

On 1 December, managers of the Salvajina hydroelectric scheme met with the community and criticized the leaders for opposing further development, though there is no evidence of the involvement of the associated companies in the threats. The threats come at a time when unidentified heavily-armed men thought to be paramilitaries have been seen patrolling in the region despite the increased presence of the armed forces in the area over recent months.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Demanding the authorities take decisive action to guarantee the protection of the six threatened men, in accordance with their wishes;
- Calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into the threats sent to them, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 JANUARY 2010 TO:

Vice-President

Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón
Vicepresidencia de la República
Carrera 8A No 7-27
Bogotá, Colombia

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

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

Minister of Interior and Justice

Sr. Fabio Valencia Cossio
Ministerio Del Interior y De Justicia
Carrera 9a. No. 14-10,
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 560 4630/599 8961

Salutation: Dear Minister/Sr. Ministro

And copies to:

Local NGO

NOMADESC
Carrera 4 No. 4-43 ofi.201
Cali
Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 293/09 (AMR 23/025/2009). Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/025/2009/en

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

SIX COLOMBIANS THREATENED VIA TEXT MESSAGE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 22 October six individuals and members of five organizations received a death threat from the paramilitary group Black Eagles New Generation (*Aguilas Negras Nueva Generación*) in a fax sent to the Trade Union Congress, CUT. Two of those threatened, Licifrey Arara and Edwar Villegas, also received the text message on 4 December. Since 22 October, four Indigenous people have been killed in the Cerro Tijeras Reservation, in Suárez municipality, Cauca department, by armed men.

On 5 November in a meeting called by the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) the government and community representatives, including Licifrey Arara, met to discuss the human rights situation in the municipalities of Suárez, Morales and Buenos Aires, which has been affected by the development of a hydroelectric project and large-scale gold-mining by multinational corporations in the region.

Indigenous Peoples, as well as peasant farmers and Afro-descendant communities are among the groups most affected by the internal armed conflict in Colombia. These communities often live in areas of intense military conflict, many of them on land rich in natural resources such as minerals and oil. At particular risk of attack are those communities living in areas earmarked for large-scale mineral and oil exploitation, agro-industrial developments or hydro-electric or other infrastructure schemes. Repeatedly these communities have faced mass forced displacement and other human rights violations committed by the security forces and paramilitaries operating in collusion with the armed forces. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for abuses against members of these communities.

Such abuses are sometimes designed to force them off their lands, which are then opened up for large-scale economic development. Community members who have opposed such developments have repeatedly been the target of death threats and killings. The security forces repeatedly label these communities as "subversive." Such accusations are often followed by paramilitary attacks. Guerrilla groups also threaten and kill members of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities they accuse of siding with "the enemy."

Since the Salvajina hydroelectric plant was built in the mid-1980s, Indigenous communities and other inhabitants who have demonstrated against what they consider to have been the detrimental effects of the project on their livelihoods have received repeated death threats and several leaders have been killed following their participation in protests by paramilitaries operating in collusion with the security forces. Amnesty International is not suggesting that it has evidence of the involvement of the associated companies in these incidents.

Further information on UA: 293/09 Index: AMR 23/031/2009 Issue Date: 10 December 2009

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

