

URGENT ACTION

COLOMBIAN DEFENDERS AT RISK AFTER THREATS

A member of the Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (ASFADDES), Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez, was threatened by a paramilitary group on 6 September in Barrancabermeja, Colombia. Other members of ASFADDES are also under threat.

On 4 September, two men on a motorbike took pictures of **Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez** – the coordinator of the Barrancabermeja branch of Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos, ASFADDES) – and her mother. Later that day, two men on a different motorbike parked in front of their house in Barrancabermeja and watched the house for several minutes. On 6 September, Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez received a threatening text message from the paramilitary group Los Urabeños. The text message told her to put an end to her campaigning relating to the killing and enforced disappearance of John Jairo Amador Valencia. The message said, “We know where you live, we have located you, ASFADDES coordinator Luz Almanza”. Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez has said that following this threat she has continued to be followed.

On 22 May, the body of John Jairo Amador Valencia, who had not been seen since 20 May, was found in the small village of Tenerife in Barrancabermeja. His hands and feet had been tied up. The killing followed the anniversary of the enforced disappearance of his cousin Riky Nelson Garcia in Barrancabermeja, along with 24 other people, on 16 May 1998. ASFADDES is campaigning for justice in cases of enforced disappearances and killings, including recent enforced disappearances and killings of motorcyclists providing taxi services in Barrancabermeja.

On 27 July, a phone call was made to the office of ASFADDES in Bogotá, Colombia, in which a recording was played, offering them two free spaces in a cemetery. On 30 August, ASFADDES, together with other NGOs organized events to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. Some men behaving suspiciously attended both the Bogotá and Medellín events taking pictures of members of ASFADDES.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez, her mother, and other members of ASFADDES;
- Calling on the authorities to guarantee their safety and order a full and impartial investigation into the threats and surveillance, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Reminding authorities to fulfil their obligations regarding the situation of human rights defenders, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Urge the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 OCTOBER 2012 TO:

President

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

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

Minister of Interior

Señor Fernando Carrillo
 Ministro del Interior
 Carrera 9a No 14-10, piso 8
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 283 9876

**Salutation: Dear Minister/
 Estimado Sr. Ministro**

And copies to:

ASFADDES
 Association for Relatives of the
 Detained-Disappeared
 Calle 77 No. 14-47
 Oficina: 501 – Edificio Santa Lucia
 Bogotá
 Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During Colombia's long-running armed conflict, members of human rights organizations, trade unions and other social organizations have often suffered threats, enforced disappearance or killings. Colombia's paramilitary groups supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003, but it is clear from the threats against human rights organizations and trade unions, in Barrancabermeja and elsewhere, that they are still operating.

ASFADDES is a national non-governmental human rights organization made up of relatives of victims of enforced disappearance, who work to find out what has happened to their relatives and bring those responsible to justice. In Barrancabermeja, ASFADDES has an office which in the past has had to close temporarily for security concerns. In 2009 Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez received a death threat from paramilitaries, declaring her a military target. Together with other members of ASFADDES in Barrancabermeja she has been seeking the whereabouts of their relatives and campaigning to bring to justice those responsible for such human rights violations.

On 16 May 1998 a large heavily armed paramilitary force drove unhindered through a number of poorer districts of the city of Barrancabermeja. On route the gunmen rounded up residents, killing several on the spot and forcing many others on to trucks. Paramilitaries forcibly abducted 25 people, including Riky Nelson Garcia. He was abducted after being forced off his motorcycle and beaten. In January 2009 his body along with other four men who were subjected to enforced disappearance was found in a mass grave. When his cousin John Jairo Amador Valencia was forcibly disappeared on 20 May 2012, the local office of the Attorney General was reportedly reluctant to immediately activate the urgent search mechanism.

Harassment and threats against ASFADDES have intensified recently, at a time when retired general Mauricio Santoyo, who allegedly was involved in the illegal telephone-tapping of the ASFADDES offices in Medellín in advance of the enforced disappearance of Ángel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve on 6 October 2000, has been captured and extradited for drug-trafficking crimes. Ángel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve were members of the Medellín branch of ASFADDES.

Name: Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez (f), other members of ASFADDES
Gender m/f: Both

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