

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/61/98

UA 222/98

Fear for safety / "Disappearance"

17 August 1998

**COLOMBIA Heladio Penagos Rojas, President of Tibacuy municipal council,  
Cundinamarca Department**

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There is serious concern for the safety of Heladio Penagos Rojas after two unidentified men reportedly abducted him from his house on 10 August 1998 in the village of San Francisco, Tibacuy municipality. His whereabouts remain unknown.

Heladio Penagos Rojas, President of Tibacuy municipal council and a left-wing member of the *Partido Liberal*, Liberal Party, was a well-known community activist with involvement in a number of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Recently he had publicly expressed his concern at the increasing political violence in the municipality and at announcements made by paramilitary groups of their intention to carry out incursions in the region.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

On 10 May 1997 Heladio Penagos Rojas had his house illegally searched by soldiers of the "Miguel Antonio Caro" Battalion of the XIII Brigade whose barracks are situated close to his village of San Francisco. He was subsequently detained and taken to Bogotá where he was interrogated by members of the XX Brigade [the army's intelligence brigade which has since been dismantled after repeated allegations of involvement in human rights violations and paramilitary activities]. He was released three days later without charge.

Paramilitary organizations have repeatedly targeted community leaders and left wing activists for "disappearance" and/or extrajudicial execution, accusing them of being guerrilla auxiliaries or sympathizers. Those who denounce impending paramilitary attacks are particularly likely to be singled out by the military and their paramilitary allies for human rights violations.

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Over the past five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. In 1989, although the Colombian Government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups, they continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country. No effective steps have been taken as yet by the authorities to control their actions and to hold members accountable for serious and widespread human rights violations. The Attorney General recently stated that more than 200 outstanding arrest warrants issued against alleged paramilitary members responsible for widespread human rights violations have still not been acted upon by the security forces.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Heladio Penagos Rojas who was abducted from his home on 10 August 1998 in Tibacuy municipality, Cundinamarca Department;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into his forced disappearance, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the area and urging that those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments;
- reminding Colombia's new government of the country's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

**APPEALS TO: (fax tones may only be available during office hours local time)**

President of Colombia

Señor Presidente, Dr. Andrés Pastrana Arango, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telexes: 44281 PALP CO**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 286 7434**

**Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana**

Minister of Defence

Dr. Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo, Ministro de Defensa Nacional  
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO / 44561 CFAC CO**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 222 1874**

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

Governor of Department of Cundinamarca

Sr. Andrés González Díaz  
Gobernador del Departamento de Cundinamarca  
Gobernación de Cundinamarca, Avenida Jiménez No. 7-50  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Gobernador de Cundinamarca, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 2860234**

**Salutation: Estimado Sr./ Dear Sir.**

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior  
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2  
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

**Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telexes:45406 MINGO CO**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405**

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

**COPIES 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 your section office, if sending appeals after 28 September 1998.