

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety

21 Decemb

COLOMBIA William BEDOYA, human rights lawyer

Corporación Regional de Derechos Humanos (CREDHOS), Regional Human Rights Corporation and Asociación de Familiares Detenidos y Desaparecidos (ASFADDES), Association of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared

The shooting, on 14 December 1999, of human rights lawyer William Bedoya in the city of Barrancabermeja, department of Santander, has raised concern for the safety of other human rights defenders in the city.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned for members of the *Corporación Regional de Derechos Humanos (CREDHOS), Regional Human Rights Corporation and Asociación de Familiares Detenidos y Desaparecidos (ASFADDES), Association of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared*. Both organizations have recently been threatened, harassed and intimidated, including computer records being stolen from the CREDHOS offices and a failed attempt on the life of its director in March (see UA 277/99, 21 October 1999 AMR 23/74/99).

William Bedoya, who works with political prisoners and has reportedly been threatened with death before, apparently by paramilitary groups operating in the area, was shot by two gunmen as he was leaving his house in Barrancabermeja. He is now in intensive care in hospital.

Human rights lawyers who represent political prisoners have often been labelled as subversives by the security forces and their paramilitary allies and been the target of serious human rights violations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The policy by the security forces and their paramilitary allies of labelling human rights organizations, particularly those seeking to uphold the legal rights of people accused of "subversion", as guerrilla collaborators or supporters means they are able to present them as legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war. This has resulted in an increasing number of serious human rights violations by the security forces and their paramilitary allies against human rights defenders - over 20 have been killed or "disappeared" in the last two years. Some armed opposition groups also refuse to respect the legitimacy and independence of organisations which belong to civil society.

On 9 September 1999, Colombia's Human Rights Day, President Andrés Pastrana issued Presidential Directive No 07 concerning 'support, communication and cooperation of the Colombian State with human rights organizations'. The Directive orders all public officials to abstain from questioning the legitimacy of human rights organizations and from making false accusations which could compromise their security or reputation.

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

- expressing alarm at the shooting of human rights lawyer William Bedoya in Barrancabermeja on 14 December 1999;
- expressing concern for the safety of other human rights defenders in the city;

- urging the authorities to undertake all measures deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves, to guarantee their safety;
- urging the authorities to carry out a full and impartial investigation into the shooting of William Bedoya, to make the results public and to bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO:President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, 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 1 286 7434 / 284 2186 / 337 1351 / 286 6842

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

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

Telegrams: Ministerio del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5884 / 342 3201

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña
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 Santander Department

Sr. Miguel de Jesús Arenas Prada, Gobernador del Departamento de Santander,
Gobernación de Santander, Calle 37, No. 10-30, Bucaramanga, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 7 633 9889

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO:CREDHOS

AA 505

Barrancabermeja

Santander

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 7 February 2000.