

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/068/2003

21 October 2003

Further Information on UA 144/02 (AMR 23/55/2002, 13 May 2002) Fear for safety/ Death Threats

COLOMBIA Yolanda Becerra (f), President of the *Organización Femenina Popular (OFP)*
Popular Women=s Organization in Barrancabermeja, Santander department
Other Members of OFP

Killed: Esperanza Amaris Miranda (f), aged 40

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the members of the *Organización Femenina Popular (OFP)*, Popular Women's Organization, following the killing of one of its members in the city of Barrancabermeja, Santander department.

On 16 October at 7:30 pm, Esperanza Amaris Miranda was reportedly abducted from her house in the Versalles district of the city and forced into a taxi by three members of the army-backed paramilitary group *Bloque Central Bolívar*, Central Bolivar Bloc, of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC)*, United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia which operates in the area. Her 21-year-old daughter tried to stop the abduction and fought with the kidnappers. Five minutes later, Esperanza Amaris Miranda was killed in front of the Camilo Torres Restrepo School and her body thrown into the middle of the street.

Esperanza Amaris Miranda was a member of the OFP, and had worked in the north-eastern branch of the organization in the Primero de Mayo area of the city since 2002. She had reportedly been the victim of death threats by army-backed paramilitaries prior to her death and the attorney general's office was reportedly informed of the threats.

Yolanda Becerra and other members of the OFP continue to receive paramilitary death threats. In September, army-backed paramilitaries declared the OFP to be a "military target" ("*objetivo militar*") and reportedly threatened to kill Yolanda Becerra. Following the killing of Esperanza Amaris Miranda, Yolanda Becerra called on the authorities to provide guarantees for the safety of the OFP so that the organization can carry out its legitimate human rights work.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Barrancabermeja is under siege from army-backed paramilitaries who control entire areas of the city, despite the presence of large numbers of security forces. According to the regional ombudsman's office so far in 2003, 94 people have been killed, 56 have "disappeared" and at least 600 have been displaced in the city of Barracabermeja. Human rights defenders, their families and other members of civilian society have frequently been harassed, tortured and killed by paramilitaries and the security and armed forces. They are accused of being guerrilla sympathizers.

The OFP has been working to promote women's human rights in Barrancabermeja, department of Santander and surrounding areas for more than 30 years. They refuse to cooperate with army-backed paramilitary groups, and have therefore faced continual threats and harassment.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- calling for an immediate, impartial and full investigation into the killing of Esperanza Amaris Miranda, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of members of the *Organización Femenina Popular* (OFP), including Yolanda Becerra, so they may continue their legitimate work for the defence and promotion of human rights;
- urging the government to adhere to its obligations regarding human rights defenders, as laid out in the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and in repeated resolutions by the Organization of American States; that they should take measures to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders;
- expressing concern that the government has taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the Barrancabermeja area, despite UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Santander, urging that the results are made public, and that those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 Carrera 8 No.7-26
 Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: **Presidente de la Republica, Bogota, Colombia**
Fax: **+ 57 1 342 0592 / 337 58 90**
Salutation: **Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe / Dear President Uribe**

Governor of Santander Department

Sr. Jorge Eliecer Gómez Villamizar, Gobernador del Departamento de Santander, Gobernación de Santander,
 Calle 37, No. 10-30,
 Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Telegram: **Gobernador Santander, Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia**
Fax: **+ 57 76 842843**
Salutation: **Dear Governor Gómez Villamizar / Sr. Gobernador Gómez Villamizar**

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite)
 Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: **Fiscal General, Bogota, Colombia**
Fax: **+ 57 1 570 2022 / 2017 (if someone answers say “me da tono de fax por favor”)**
Salutation: **Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio**

COPIES TO:

Grassroots women’s organization

Organización Femenina Popular
 Cra 22 No 52B – 36
 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 2 December 2003.