

UA 144/01

Fear for

COLOMBIA Islena REY (f), only surviving member of the Meta Civic Human Rights Committee

Killed: Gonzálo ZARATE (m), member of the Meta Civic Human Rights Committee
His brother (name unknown)

Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of Islena Rey, who is the only surviving member of a disbanded human rights organization after one other member and his brother have been shot dead.

On 5 June, Gonzálo Zarate and his brother were reportedly killed by unidentified gunmen at their home in the Manantial district of Villavicencio, capital of the department of Meta.

Islena Rey and Gonzálo Zarate used to be members of the non-governmental human rights organization *Comité Cívico de Derechos Humanos del Meta*, Meta Civic Human Rights Committee, which was disbanded several years ago. Before it was disbanded, the organization played an important role in denouncing human rights violations committed by the security forces and their paramilitary allies in Meta. As a result, its members received death threats and were subjected to human rights abuses by army-backed paramilitaries. Six months after its foundation in 1991, its members began to be threatened and intimidated. In 1992, four leading members were gunned down, and a health clinic associated with the organization was forced to close following a series of death threats. In its second year the organization faced continuing threats, and three of its members "disappeared". On 13 October 1996 its president, Josué Giraldo, was killed in Villavicencio. The Colombian authorities failed to bring those responsible for this and similar killings to justice, and also took no action against those behind the death threats. The lack of protection left the members of the Meta Civic Human Rights Committee exposed, and led to its disbandment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At least 25 human rights defenders have been killed or "disappeared" in Colombia in the last three years, and others have been forced into exile in fear for their lives. Human rights defenders, who have sought to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations, or to expose the links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, have frequently become the victims of human rights violations.

Paramilitary groups backed by the army have killed several thousand civilians in the past five years alone, and continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Islena Rey, the only surviving member of the non-governmental human rights organization *Comité Cívico de Derechos Humanos del Meta*;
- urging the Colombian authorities to take immediate and effective action to protect Islena Rey;
- expressing concern at the killing of Gonzálo Zarate and his brother, and calling for a full and impartial investigation into the killing, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;

- urging the Colombian government to adhere to its obligations regarding human rights defenders, as laid out in United Nations and Organization of American States declarations and resolutions, and in line with repeated recommendations made by the UN to the Colombian Government;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Meta, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

Colombian fax numbers can be difficult to reach. Please be patient and try during Colombian office hours (GMT -5).

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No.7-26
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Vice-President of the Republic

Señor Vicepresidente Gustavo Bell Lemus
Alto Consejero Presidencial para asuntos de Derechos Humanos y lucha Contra la Corrupción
Cra. 8 #7-26, Palacio de Nariño,
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 337 1350 / 337 1351

Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente / Dear Vice-President

Governor of Meta department

Gobernador del Departamento del Meta
Sr. Alan Jara Urzola
Gobernación del Meta
Carrera 33 No. 38-45
Villavicencio, Meta, COLOMBIA

Fax: + 57 86 36599

Salutation: Dear Governor / Estimado Gobernador

COPIES TO:

Church Organization

Pastoral Social de la Diócesis de Villavicencio
AA 3470, Villavicencio
Meta, 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 19 July 2001.