

PUBLIC

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UA 240/01

Fear for Safety/Extrajudicial Execution 20 September 2001

COLOMBIA

Yolanda Cerón (f),
Members of Catholic Church organization *Pastoral Social*,
and other human rights defenders in Tumaco, department of
Nariño

On 19 September 2001, Yolanda Cerón, human rights defender and Director of the Catholic Church organization *Pastoral Social*, was killed by two gunmen thought to be members of army-backed paramilitary forces in the town of Tumaco, department of Nariño.

Yolanda left her office around noon and as she approached Nariño Park, in central Tumaco, several shots were fired at her. She was transported to hospital in Tumaco, where she was pronounced dead soon after arriving as eight shots had fatally wounded her. For several days prior to her killing, Yolanda reportedly informed her *Pastoral Social* colleagues that their offices were under constant surveillance, that she was being harassed and that she was being followed by unidentified men.

Yolanda and other members of *Pastoral Social* have campaigned against the increasingly grave human rights situation in the region and have provided assistance to victims. Her death raises serious concerns for the safety of members of *Pastoral Social*, other human rights defenders, and the civilian population of Tumaco. It also heightens concerns for neighboring communities, whose inhabitants are predominantly Afro-Colombians and members of indigenous communities.

Paramilitaries backed by the security forces began operating in Tumaco in September 2000 and threatened to kill human rights defenders shortly afterwards. A number of human rights activists have actually been killed (See AMR 23/041/2001, 2 April 2001 - Further information on UA 382/00 AMR 23/102/00, 19 December 2000; UA 206/01, AMR 23/080/01, 17 August 2001).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. In the last five years alone, several thousand civilians have been killed. The security forces, who maintain a heavy military presence in the region, have responded by reportedly capturing a number of paramilitaries. In 1989, the 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. However, paramilitaries continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

Armed opposition groups have also committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, including executions of those they accuse of being security force or paramilitary force collaborators.

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

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the 19 September killing of Yolanda Cerón, human rights defender and Director of the Catholic Church organization *Pastoral Social*, and into recent attacks on human rights defenders in the region;
- expressing concern for the safety of members of *Pastoral Social*, other human rights defenders in Tumaco and the civilian inhabitants of the region;
- urging the authorities to do everything deemed appropriate by those under threat to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Tumaco, department of Nariño, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;

- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

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

Telegram: **President, Bogotá, Colombia**

Fax: **+ 57 1 566 2071 / 286 7434 / 286 6842 / 284 2186**

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

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gustavo Bell

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Centro Administrativo Nacional

Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52, OFI 217

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

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

Telex: **42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO**

Faxes: **+ 57 1 222 0059**

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

Commander of the Marine Infantry Training Base BEIM2

Lieutenant Colonel Nicolás Montenegro Montenegro

Commander of BEIM 2 (Base de Entrenamiento de Infantería de Marina

Apostadero Naval

Tumaco, Nariño

Telegrams: **Comandante BEIM2, Tumaco, Colombia**

Telefax: **+ 57 927 272 821**

Salutation: **Sr Comandante.**

COPIES TO:

National non-governmental human rights organization

Pastoral Social

Diócesis de Tumaco

Tumaco, Nariño

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 November 2001.