

UA 91/00

Fea.

COLOMBIA Martha Elizabeth SOTO GALLO, human rights defender

Human rights activist Martha Elizabeth Soto Gallo has received a telephone death threat, and Amnesty International is concerned for her safety, and that of other members of the organisation she works for.

Martha Elizabeth Soto Gallo works for the Medellín branch of the *Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* (ASFADDES), Association of Families of the Detained Disappeared. A message was apparently left on her office's answering machine on 13 April: "*Martha Soto, cuídese que la tenemos en la mente ... Martha Soto, cuídese que la tenemos en la mira y pillada*", "Martha Soto, be careful we have you in mind ... Martha Soto, be careful we have you in our sights and you are trapped".

ASFADDES is a non-governmental human rights organization made up of families of the "disappeared", who work to find out what has happened to their relatives and bring those responsible to justice. In the past ASFADDES members, together with other human rights defenders and witnesses of human rights violations, have been the subject of death threats, killings and disappearances at the hands of the security forces and their paramilitary allies.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Paramilitary groups backed by the army have killed several thousand civilians over the past five years alone, and continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. 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 in 1989, yet they continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

The security forces and their paramilitary allies routinely label human rights organizations and defenders as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, so they can present them as legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war. At least 25 human rights defenders have been killed or "disappeared" in the last three years. Some armed opposition groups also refuse to respect the legitimacy and independence of organisations which belong to civil society.

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

- expressing concern about the death threat made against Martha Elizabeth Soto Gallo on 13 April and urging a full investigation, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging that immediate measures be taken to guarantee the safety of Martha Soto and members of the ASFADDES in Medellín, to ensure that they can continue to carry out their work of promoting and protecting human rights in accordance with international human rights standards;
- urging the Colombian government to adhere to its obligations regarding human rights defenders, as laid out in the *UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* adopted on 9 December 1998, the *Organization of American States Human Rights Defenders in the Americas* resolution adopted on 7 June 1999 [AG/RES. 1671 (XXIX-O/99)] and in line with repeated recommendations made by the UN to the Colombian Government to take measures to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders.

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

Telegrams:President Pastrana, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939/284 2186/289 3377

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

Fax: + 57 1 337 1351

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

Minister of Interior

Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez
Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior
Palacio Echeverry
Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.
Santafé de Bogotá
COLOMBIA

Telegrams:Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 286 8025

Salutation:Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

Association for Relatives of the "Disappeared"

Señores
ASFADDES
AA 011446
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 1 June 2000.