

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/63/00

UA 258/00

Fear for

COLOMBIA
Mónica Madero Vergel, human rights defender
Other CREDHOS members

An anonymous caller has threatened to kill the secretary of the human rights organisation CREDHOS. Amnesty International believes that she and other members of the organisation are in grave danger.

The caller, who rang Mónica Madero Vergel on her mobile phone on 26 August at 3.50pm, accused her of being a guerrilla and warned her to leave Barrancabermeja "together with her friends" ("*junto con sus amigos*") - thought to mean other CREDHOS workers - or else they would be killed.

CREDHOS (*Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (Regional Human Rights Committee) is based in Barrancabermeja, in the central department of Santander. CREDHOS workers have played a vital role in drawing international attention to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by guerrillas, the security forces and paramilitaries. They have sought to expose the strong links between the security forces and paramilitary groups.

A death list is reported to be circulating in the department of Santander, naming between 500 and 1000 people, including social activists and human rights defenders. The security forces and their paramilitary allies often draw up such lists of people they consider to be guerrilla collaborators or sympathizers. Those named on these lists have frequently suffered serious human rights violations. Other human rights defenders in the area have recently faced death threats and human rights violations (See UA 82/00, AMR 23/20/00, 13 April; UA 133/00, AMR 23/38/00, 25 May; UA 163/00, AMR 23/47/00, 16 June, and follow up, AMR 23/54/00, 14 July.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Colombian army and security forces, and their paramilitary allies, commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Paramilitary groups have killed several thousand civilians over the past five years. 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 paramilitaries have a policy of labelling human rights organizations as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, so they can present them as legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war. Over 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 organizations which belong to civil society.

Human rights defenders working with CREDHOS and other non-governmental organizations in Barrancabermeja and the Magdalena Medio region have suffered continuous threats and harassment for carrying out their legitimate work to promote and protect human rights in accordance with internationally recognized standards. Many have been killed and others have been forced to leave the region.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Mónica Madero Vergel, who has received a telephone death threat against her and other CREDHOS workers;
- urging a full and impartial investigation, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of CREDHOS members, so they can continue their work of promoting and protecting human rights in accordance with international human rights standards;
- urging the 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, and the *Organization of American States Human Rights Defenders in the Americas* resolution adopted on 7 June 1999 [AG/RES. 1671 (XXIX-O/99)];
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Barrancabermeja and the surrounding area, 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: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 1 286 7434/287 7939/284 2186/289 3377/337 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

Fax: + 57 1 337 1351

Salutation: Dear Vice-President / Excmo. Sr Vicepresidente

Minister of Interior

Dr. Humberto de la Calle
 Ministro del Interior
 Ministerio del Interior
 Palacio Echeverry
 Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.
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 COLOMBIA

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Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr Ministro

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 11 October 2000.