

UA 51/99

Death thro

ECUADORAlexis Ponce (human rights defender)
Edgar Ponce Iturriaga (trade unionist)
Dr. Rodrigo Borja Cevallos (former President of Ecuador)
Bishop Alberto Luna Tobar (Roman Catholic church)
Cecilia Calderón de Castro [f] (parliamentarian from *Izquierda Democrática*)
René Maugé (parliamentarian from *Izquierda Democrática*)
Dr. Hernán Rivadeneira (leader of the *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano*)
Nela Martínez [f] (writer)
Belén Andrade [f] (journalist)
Emma Ortega (f) (women's activist)

The above ten men and women, all public figures in Ecuador, are reported to be on a death list, and Amnesty International fears for their safety. An eleventh person on the list, opposition parliamentarian Jaime Hurtado Gonzalez from the *Movimiento Popular Democrático*, was shot dead on 17 February 1999, together with two others (see UA 28/99, AI Index: AMR 28/04/99, 19 February 1999).

All 11 were apparently among some 600 foreigners invited to a "peace dialogue" ("*diálogo de paz*") in Colombia last January on the internal armed conflict in that country.

One of them, Alexis Ponce, is the spokesperson (*vocero*) of the *Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos* (APDH), a non-governmental human rights organization based in the capital, Quito. The day after the assassination of Jaime Hurtado, the APDH received threatening phone calls which forced them to move to different offices. A few days later Alexis Ponce heard that his own name was on the death list and left Quito.

He returned briefly to the city on 4 March, to meet an officer of the *Policía Nacional*, National Police, who apparently showed him a list of the Ecuadoreans invited to the "peace dialogue". The police were following a lead (*hipótesis*) that these people were on the death list, and had been targeted by Colombian paramilitaries. However, Alexis Ponce told the officer that it was possible that those who planned and carried out the killings of Jaime Hurtado and the two others were Ecuadoreans rather than Colombians.

For several days after this meeting, friends looking after Alexis Ponce's house received anonymous telephone threats. On 12 March, while his friends were out, his house was broken into. Documents and files containing human rights information were opened and a small strong-box containing a tape-recording with information about the killing of a prominent Ecuadorean trade unionist (see *Ecuador: The death of Saúl Cañar Pauta*, AI Index: AMR 28/03/98, December 1998), was stolen. Alexis Ponce believes that whoever broke in was looking for information about the assassination of Jaime Hurtado.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These death threats and the break-in come at a time of economic, social and political crisis in Ecuador.

Since President Jamil Mahuad Witt took office in August 1998, his government has implemented a series of measures designed to tackle the crisis, including declaring states of emergency which have resulted in the mobilization of the National Police and the armed forces.

