

Colombia Human Rights Defenders in Antioquia

Concerns for the safety of human rights defenders in the department of Antioquia have been heightened by the recent killing of Jesús María Valle Jaramillo. Jaramillo was president of *Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de Antioquia - "Héctor Abad Gómez"*, (CPDH), Antioquia Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights - "Héctor Abad Gómez", a non-governmental human rights organization. Jesús María Valle Jaramillo is the fourth president of the Antioquia Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights to be killed. He was also a university professor and a Conservative Party local councillor

Amnesty International fears that unless serious efforts are made to bring to justice those responsible for the killing of Jesús María Valle Jaramillo, the security of human rights defenders in Antioquia will deteriorate rapidly.

Jesús María Valle Jaramillo was shot dead in his office in Medellín, department of Antioquia, by unidentified gunmen, on 27 February 1998. He had received repeated death threats in recent weeks because of his human rights work. In particular, Jesús María Valle Jaramillo had denounced a number of massacres committed by paramilitary groups in the department of Antioquia in recent months, including a paramilitary attack on his home town of Ituango in which at least 17 people were killed. He had also publicly denounced the fact that paramilitary groups responsible for widespread human rights violations had operated in unison with the Colombian armed forces.

Three previous presidents of the CPDH, including Dr. Héctor Abad Gómez, were killed in 1987 and 1988. Those responsible have not been brought to justice.

In the past those who have denounced human rights violations committed by the security forces or their paramilitary allies have themselves often been the target of serious human rights violations. Similarly those who have publicly denounced the close links between the security forces and paramilitary forces have been accused of being guerrilla sympathizers and been victim to death threats and serious human rights violations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights defenders in Colombia have in recent years faced increasing harassment and intimidation, which in some cases has been followed by attacks on their lives. On 19 May 1997, Mario Calderón and Elsa Alvarado, human rights defenders with the non-governmental organization *Centro de Investigación e Educación Popular* (CINEP), Research and Popular Education Centre, were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in their home in the capital Bogotá. Shortly before the killings senior military commanders had labelled CINEP's human rights work as being part of a subversive political strategy to discredit the armed forces.

On 9 September 1994 President Ernesto Samper Pizano, who took office on 7 August, declared in a speech that his government "would seek to have constructive relations with human rights organizations with the aim of suppressing human rights violations and would do everything necessary to protect the lives and integrity of human rights workers. [*Buscará sostener con los organismos de derechos humanos relaciones constructivas en procura de suprimir las violaciones de tales derechos y pondrá de su parte cuanto sea necesario para proteger la vida y la integridad de sus miembros.*"] Amnesty International calls

upon President Samper to stand by his commitment and ensure that members of CINEP and all other human rights workers can carry out their lawful activities, without fear for their own lives or those of their families.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defenders in the department of Antioquia and for all measures deemed appropriate to be taken to protect their lives, following the killing of Jesús María Valle Jaramillo on 27 February 1998 by unidentified gunmen;
- calling for a full and impartial investigations into his death, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño
 Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 2186/289 3377/286 7434

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Diagonal 22B 5201
 Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá
 Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2000 (ext 2017)

Salutation: Estimado Dr./Dear Dr.

Governor of Antioquia

Dr. Alberto Builes Ortega
 Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia, Gobernación de Antioquia
 Calle 42B, # 52-106, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador Departamento, Antioquia, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 4 381 1342

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

In appeals to the Governor of Antioquia, acknowledge that although guerrilla forces in Colombian have violated international humanitarian law this in no way justifies human rights violations by the Colombian security forces and their paramilitary allies.

COPIES TO:

Colombian Commission of Jurists

Comisión Colombiana de Juristas
 AA 58533
 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 14 April 1998.