

EXTERNAL

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Death threats

18 July 1997

VENEZUELA Luis Jesús Bello, lawyer and human rights defender

There is concern for the safety of Luis Jesús Bello, a lawyer and director of a human rights NGO in Puerto Ayacucho, the state capital of Amazonas, after he received a death threat on 11 July 1997.

Luis Jesús Bello reportedly received the death threat during an interview being given and broadcast on a local radio station by the director of a company accused by the NGO (the *Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Vicariato Apostólico de Puerto Ayacucho*, the Human Rights Office of the Apostolic Vicariate), of serious abuses against local Indian communities perpetrated with the acquiescence of local authorities. He apparently said: "*en el caso va a correr sangre*" (blood will flow in this case), in reference to the NGO's human rights and environmental campaign and, specifically, Luis Bello.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *Vicariato* continues to be in the forefront of human rights and environmental campaign work in the Amazon State. It recently led a peaceful campaign on behalf of Indian communities in San Rafael de Manuare and San Antonio de Carinagua whose members suffered unlawful land evictions by agents of *Diñacu*, a large development company known to have the support of members of the State Government. As a result, members of *Vicariato* received threats and were attacked, reportedly by those linked with the company. In May, two vehicles belonging to the *Vicariato* were attacked by unidentified individuals with acid bombs.

On 14 July the *Vicariate* made a formal complaint to the regional public attorney regarding these incidents. So far, however, no effective investigation has been carried out to bring those responsible to justice.

Amnesty International is concerned that those responsible remain free to pursue their campaign of terror aimed at human rights defenders in the Amazon State.

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

- expressing alarm at the latest threats suffered by Luis Jesús Bello as a result of the human rights and environmental campaign work carried out by the *Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Vicariato Apostólico de Puerto Ayacucho*;
- calling for thorough investigations into the threats and attacks suffered by members of the *Vicariato* and politely requesting information concerning the results of these investigations;
- reiterating Amnesty International's commitment on behalf of the work of human rights defenders worldwide;
- expressing hope that the Venezuelan authorities will honour President Rafael Caldera's publicized commitment to the defence of human rights by ensuring full and effective protection of the work of human rights defenders in the country (President Caldera has named 1997 the year of Human Rights in Venezuela).

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General

Dr. Iván Darío Badell González
Fiscal General de la República
Esquina de Manduca a Ferrenquín,

Caracas, Venezuela

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Caracas, Venezuela

Fax: + 58 2 564 7461

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General/Dear Attorney General

Governor of the State of Amazonas

Sr. Edgar Sayago Murillo

Gobernador del Estado Amazonas

Palacio de Gobierno

Puerto Ayacucho

Edo. Amazonas

Venezuela

Telegrams: Gobernador del Estado, P. Ayacucho, Amazonas, Venezuela

Salutation: Sr Gobernador/Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

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and to diplomatic representatives of Venezuela accredited to your country, as well as to relevant environmental organizations in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 August 1997.