

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 359/94 Possible "disappearance" / Fear for safety 30 September 1994

COLOMBIAJairo BARAHONA, aged 33, community leader, human rights activist
Elena MARQUEZ, his wife

On 29 September 1994 Jairo Barahona was taken violently from his home by men who identified themselves as members of the security forces. His detention has not been acknowledged, his whereabouts are not known and there is serious concern for his safety.

At approximately 7.30am on 29 September, four armed men in civilian dress arrived at Jairo Barahona's home in Bosque, Pailitas municipality, Cesar department.

Two stayed outside the house whilst two went in, asking his wife Elena Márquez where he was and identifying themselves as members of the security forces' elite Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Unit, *Unidad Antiextorsión y Secuestro (UNASE)*. Juan Barahona was in the bathroom. They forced their way in, beat him up and dragged him from the house and into their vehicle. As they left, they threatened Elena Márquez, saying that if she denounced the event they would kill her and her two young children.

The vehicle left in the direction of Aguachica, although witnesses state that it was seen three hours later close to the town of Curumaní, also in Cesar. The same vehicle had been seen close to Jairo Barahona's house the previous night.

Jairo is a well known community leader, member of the Movement for Civic-Community Integration, *Movimiento de Integración Cívico-Comunal*, in Pailitas, and founder of the local Human Rights Committee, *Comité de Derechos Humanos*. He is financial and commercial head of a public services operation in Pailitas called Emserpupa.

Jairo Barahona has suffered harassment and intimidation by the security forces for several years. In November 1992 his house was searched illegally by soldiers from the San Mateo Battalion, *Batallón San Mateo*. In June 1993 he was reportedly threatened by soldiers attached to the San Mateo Battalion because of his opposition to a local population census by the army which he believed violated the rights of Pailitas' inhabitants.

On 3 June 1994, he and another man, David Antonio Reyes Castro, were attacked by two armed men who were in a vehicle which eye-witnesses stated was usually used by the armed forces. On 17 June David Reyes Castro was killed in circumstances suggesting he may have been extrajudicially executed (See UA 245/94, 23 June, AMR 23/49/94). On 20 June several people, including Jairo Barahona, were threatened verbally by a guerrilla deserter known to be working closely with the army.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years widespread and systematic human rights violations have occurred in Colombia, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearance", torture and arbitrary arrest. President Ernesto Samper Pizano has pledged his government's commitment to protect human rights. However, members of the Colombian armed and security forces continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Civilians living in areas where guerrilla forces are active, such as this region of Cesar department, are often perceived by the armed forces as potential

guerrilla collaborators and have, as a result, been subjected to extrajudicial execution and other abuses. Only exceptionally are perpetrators brought to justice; the vast majority of members of the armed forces responsible for gross human rights violations remain in active service.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Jairo Barahona, who was violently detained on 29 September 1994 by armed men who identified themselves as members of the security forces;
- urging that, if he is detention, that he be humanely treated and allowed access to a lawyer and his family;
- urging that, if he is detention, that he charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released;
- urging that all possible measures be taken to protect Jairo Barahona's wife Elena Márquez and their children following the threats made by the security force agents who detained him;
- urging that all possible measures be taken to protect community leaders and human rights workers, so that they can carry out their lawful activities.

APPEALS TO

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

2) Procurator General:

Dr. Orlando Vásquez Velásquez
 Procurador General de la Nación
 Procuraduría General
 Edificio Banco Ganadero
 Carrera 5, No. 15-80
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General Vasquez, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 342 9723

Salutation:Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Vásquez

3) Advocate for the People:

Dr. Jaime Córdoba Triviño
 Defensor del Pueblo
 Defensoría del Pueblo
 Calle 35 No. 7-25 piso 5
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Defensor del Pueblo Trivino, Defensoria del Pueblo, Bogota, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 346 1225

Salutation: Estimado Dr Triviño/Dear Dr. Triviño

4) Minister of Defence

Dr. Fernando Botero Zea

Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa Botero, Bogota, Colombia
Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO
Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874 or 288 4906
Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Alternative Legal Association
MINGA
AA 40303
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 11 November 1994.