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@ "Disappeared" human rights lawyer - two judicial police agents arrested

Alirio de Jesús Pedraza Becerra, lawyer and human rights worker, "disappeared" on the night of 4 July 1990 in Bogotá. According to various eye-witnesses, about eight heavily armed men in plain clothes seized Dr. Pedraza at about 10pm on 4 July as he was leaving a bakery in the "La Campiña" shopping centre in Bogotá's Suba district. The armed men reportedly arrived beforehand in three cars (one was a white Chevrolet Trooper, another a dark Mazda). According to some reports two of the armed men identified themselves to two police agents who stood by during the abduction of Dr. Pedraza. Dr. Pedraza reportedly called out his name as he was being pushed into the Mazda.

Dr. Pedraza had just attended a meeting at the Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, (CSPP), Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee in central Bogotá. A 40-year-old lawyer and long-standing active member of this human rights organization, Dr. Pedraza was investigating a number of cases of human rights violations attributed to the Colombian armed forces. Dr. Pedraza was representing relatives of peasants killed when troops belonging to the Luciano D'Eluyar Battalion opened fire on hundreds of peasants during a protest march in May 1988 in Llano Caliente, in Santander department's Magdalena Medio region. Dr. Pedraza had also just been working on behalf of a number of trade unionists detained and tortured by the army in Cali, Valle del Cauca department, at the beginning of March, accused of belonging to a guerrilla organization. Charges against them were later dropped. According to their testimonies they were tortured while held in the army's III Brigade in Cali.

He also represented victims and their families in a number of other cases of human rights violations by the Colombian army and police.

The "disappearance" of Dr. Alirio Pedraza was immediately denounced to the Procurator General's Office and the Procurator Delegate's Office for Human Rights who initiated an investigation. However, despite the efforts of Dr. Pedraza's family and colleagues to locate him, the Armed Forces and Police authorities continued to deny his detention and his whereabouts remained unknown. A judicial enquiry was also initiated into his "disappearance".

According to recent information, two members of the judicial police (Cuerpo Técnico de la Policía Judicial) were arrested at the beginning of October 1992 on suspicion of being materially responsible (autores materiales) for the human rights lawyer's abduction. A security guard who witnessed Dr. Pedraza's abduction has reportedly positively identified the two judicial police.

According to reports, one of them has confessed to kidnapping Dr. Pedraza and described how Dr. Pedraza was drugged so heavily during interrogation by the police that his mental faculties broke down. According to the police agent's statements, Dr. Pedraza was then left on a street in Barranquilla, on the Atlantic coast of Colombia. Personnel from the Procurator's Office have travelled to Barranquilla in an attempt to locate the human rights lawyer, so far without success.

Dr. Pedraza and his family had been receiving death threats several months before his "disappearance" and according to reports the Colombian army's I Brigade (Brigada I) had an arrest warrant against him. Dr. Pedraza is married with a young son.