

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS RECEIVE DEATH THREAT

Franklín Torres, Ingrid Vergara and Pedro Geney, members of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE) in Sucre Department, northern Colombia, received a death threat by email on 19 May.

On 19 May, **Franklín Torres, Ingrid Vergara and Pedro Geney**, members of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (*Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado, MOVICE*), received an email with the subject line "...you are in the spotlight there will be blood next week" (... estan [sic] en la mira la proxima semana correa sangre). The email included a picture of each of them, followed by text accusing them of being members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC*) guerrilla group. Beneath their photographs was the following text: "...if you see her denounce her or even better kill her" (...si la ve denunciela [sic] o mejor matela [sic]).

Ingrid Vergara, Franklín Torres and Pedro Geney are members of MOVICE in Sincelejo, Sucre department, which has been campaigning for the return of lands stolen by army-backed paramilitary groups, mainly in the Montes de María area. This work has included campaigning for the restitution of the "La Europa" farm situated in the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre Department. In the course of campaigning for land restitution, members of MOVICE have been threatened and killed, including Eder Verbel Rocha, who was killed by paramilitaries on 23 March 2011. On 17 May the dog of the Verbel family was poisoned and a relative of one of the alleged killers of Eder Verbel Rocha said that they were going to kill the family with poison.

On 16 May, a member of the Colombian armed forces told **Jakeline Moguea and Adolfo Verbel**, two members of MOVICE, that it would be better if they stayed at home because there was information that someone who had received threats in the past was going to be killed.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Franklín Torres, Ingrid Vergara, Pedro Geney and other members of MOVICE and urging the authorities to guarantee their safety in strict accordance with their wishes;
- Calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into all threats including previous death threats against Ingrid Vergara and her colleagues, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Reminding them to fulfil their obligations regarding the situation of human rights defenders, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Urge the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 JULY 2011 TO:

President

Señor Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631

**Salutation: Dear President Santos/
 Excmo. Sr. Presidente Santos**

Minister of Interior and Justice

Señor Germán Vargas Lleras
 Ministerio Del Interior y De Justicia
 Carrera 9a. No. 14-10, Bogotá
 Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 599 8961

**Salutation: Dear Minister Vargas
 /Estimado Sr. Ministro Vargas**

And copies to:

Moveice

Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado
 Calle 38 No 28 A 30
 Barrio Bogotá
 Sincelejo, Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 5 May, Pedro Geney was on his way home in Sincelejo, Sucre department, when two men approached him on a motorbike. One of the men got off the motorbike, pointed a gun at him and told him “hey give me your backpack, that is where you have the information” (*hey vale entrégue me la mochila que allí llevas la información*). His backpack, which they took, included a memory card from a camera with digital images of events MOVICE had organized as well as several documents including a schedule of activities planned by MOVICE.

On 30 March, the Mayor of Ovejas Municipality in the Montes de María area said that he could not trust MOVICE when there were so many organizations that are part of the FARC. This comment was made after members of MOVICE protested when the judicial police, SIJIN, was taking pictures of them at a meeting with peasant farmers from “La Europa” farm, government representatives, representatives of the company claiming ownership of the farm and members of the security forces including the army, police and judicial police. In 1994 twelve peasant farmers were killed and 80 displaced from “La Europa” farm by paramilitaries.

On 18 May 2010 Rogelio Martínez, also a member of MOVICE, and leader of the community of peasant farmers, was killed close to the farm “La Alemania” in San Onofre Municipality. The farm was stolen by army-backed paramilitaries following the killing and forced displacement of its owners. His killing appears to be related to efforts to stop campaigning against impunity and efforts to block the restitution of land.

MOVICE is a broad coalition of civil society organizations campaigning for truth, justice and reparation for the victims of Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict. The organization has documented and exposed many cases of killings and enforced disappearance carried out by the security forces and paramilitary groups in Sucre department.

Activists campaigning for the return of lands stolen mainly by paramilitary groups operating alone or in collusion with the armed forces over the course of the conflict have been particularly vulnerable to threats and killings in recent years. Most of these attacks are attributed to paramilitary groups. Guerrilla groups have also targeted human rights defenders and other social activists deemed to be a threat to their interests.

Despite government claims that all paramilitaries demobilized in a government-sponsored programme that began in 2003, such groups continue to operate and commit serious human rights violations against human rights defenders and other civilians. This is sometimes in collusion with the security forces, or with their consent.

During Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict, the security forces and paramilitary groups have frequently labelled human rights organizations and community leaders as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, and have gone on to threaten, abduct or kill them. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders and trade unionists they consider to be siding with their enemies.

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