

November 2007

UA 290/07 Fear for safety

COLOMBIA **Diana Teresa Sierra (f), member of the non-governmental human rights organization *Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz*, Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission
Other members of the organization**

Human rights defender Diana Teresa Sierra has been followed by an unidentified man. She, and other members of the organization she works for, may be in grave danger.

Diana Teresa Sierra is a lawyer for the non-governmental human rights organization *Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz* (Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission) in Bogotá. She noticed the man following her on 29 October at 9.15pm, when she left the *Justicia y Paz* office in the north of Bogotá. He followed her for about an hour on her journey towards her home, in the southern part of the city. She took a bus when she left the office, and when she got off at her stop she heard a man behind her saying into a mobile phone, "Ready, we have arrived" (*Listo, ya llegamos*). The man followed her. When she crossed a street Diana Teresa reportedly heard the man speaking into the phone again, saying, "Yes, I am following her." (*Sí, la estoy siguiendo*). She decided she would be safer if she stayed in a supermarket. She waited until the man disappeared and then made her way home.

At *Justicia y Paz*, Diana Teresa works on the case of the Afro-descendant communities of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó River Basins in the department of Chocó: army-backed paramilitaries have killed members of these communities, or forced them to flee their homes. Afro-descendant leader Orlando Valencia was reportedly killed by army-backed paramilitaries in October 2005, and Diana Teresa is the lawyer seeking justice for his community (See UA 272/05, AMR 23/037/2005, 17 October 2005).

During August and September, men were seen outside the *Justicia y Paz* offices at least four times, taking photos. The men were on their own or in pairs, and ran off each time they were spotted by members of the organization. In the past members of *Justicia y Paz* have received death threats from army-backed paramilitaries operating in close collusion with the security forces. Other human rights defenders have been killed after being kept under surveillance in the way Diana Teresa has experienced.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Justicia y Paz campaigns on behalf of civilian communities in conflict regions in Colombia, whose members have been killed, tortured or forced to flee their homes by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Due to their activities and campaigns these groups also have accused *Justicia y Paz* and other human rights organizations of being guerrilla collaborators or supporters

Justicia y Paz has been supporting the case of the Afro-descendant communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins in the departments of Chocó. Paramilitaries have attempted to force the Afro-descendant communities to grow plantations of African Palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap, and have reportedly occupied some of their land. The relationship between paramilitary threats and the cultivation of African Palm has been acknowledged by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern that Diana Teresa Sierra, of the *Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz*, has been followed, and urging the authorities to guarantee her safety and that of other members of *Justicia y Paz*;
- calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into the reported surveillance of Diana Teresa Sierra on 29 October, and of *Justicia y Paz*'s offices during August and September, and publish the results;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective action deemed appropriate by members of *Justicia y Paz* to ensure they can carry out their legitimate and important work for the defence of human rights in safety;
- reminding the authorities that their obligations to human rights defenders are laid out in the UN Declaration on the

Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Organization of American States Human Rights Defenders in the Americas resolutions and in repeated recommendations made to them by the UN.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez
Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia
Fax: +57 1 337 5890 / 342 0592
Salutation: Dear President Uribe/ Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Dr. Carlos Holguín Sardi
Ministro del Interior y Justicia
Ministerio del Interior y de Justicia, Carrera 9a. No. 14-10, Bogotá D.C. Colombia
Fax: +57 1 560 46 30
Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Sir

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación
Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C, Piso 4
Bogotá, Colombia
Fax: + 57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)
Salutation: Estimado Sr. Fiscal/Dear Mr Iguarán

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

Justicia y Paz Intereclesial
Calle 62, No. 17-26 (Chapinero)
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 17 December 2007.
