

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/022/2006

12 May 2006

UA 131/06

Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA

Members of human rights NGO  
*Corporación Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo"*

---

Paramilitaries have sent a threatening email to a prominent human rights organization, warning them to abandon their human rights work or suffer grave consequences. Amnesty International believes their lives are in danger.

Colombia's army-backed paramilitary groups have officially been demobilising, in a government-sponsored process that will supposedly be completed this year. Despite this, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups operating in coordination with the security forces. It appears that many paramilitary groups have not demobilized at all, but are continuing to operate under new names.

The email was sent on 8 May to the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo"*, the "José Alvear Restrepo" Lawyers' Collective, and copied to the indigenous organization *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia* (ONIC), the non-governmental organization *Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Alternativos* (ILSA) and the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Trade Union Confederation, and to the human rights organization *Plataforma Colombiana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo*.

The email warned that its authors would "make the international community see that you are nothing but protectors of terrorists, fomenters of terrorism on a grand scale, and our homeland no longer wants to have any knowledge of these guerrilla groups, the FARC or ELN or anything else that resembles the left, socialism or disguised communism." (*Vamos a hacer ver a la comunidad internacional que en realidad ustedes no son más que protectores de terroristas, fomentadores del terrorismo a gran escala en nuestra patria que no desea mas saber de ustedes o las FARC o del ELN o del cualquier cosa que suene a izquierda chavismo socialismo o comunismo disfrazado.*)

The email was sent from an address which included the phrase "Colombia Libre," the name given by the paramilitary umbrella organization *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, on its website. This is the main army-backed paramilitary structure involved in the supposed demobilization of its combatants. The email suggests that the AUC is still operating, under a variety of identities: "and as we are making clear to you the United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia were our base and have completed one phase of their service to the people of Colombia, and once the processes of demobilization have been completed these groups are now the present and future of the Colombian State for years to come ... we are present in 21 rural and urban areas ... and we operate in a variety of forms". (*...hacemos ver ante ustedes que las autodefensas unidas de Colombia fueron nuestra base y han cumplido ya un ciclo al servicio del pueblo y a favor del pueblo, que una vez cumplidos los procesos de desmovilización ahora somos el presente y el futuro por muchos años del estado colombiano... hacemos presencia activa en 21 áreas rurales y urbanas ...y actuamos bajo múltiples formas de agrupación...*)

The email invites the *Colectivo de Abogados* to join "our crusade against terrorism or each one of your members will suffer the full weight of our presence, we are in good standing with the State's armed forces who always support us" ("*nuestra cruzada contra el terrorismo o se atengan a sufrir en cada uno de sus miembros de todo el peso de nuestra presencia, estamos con el favor de las mismas fuerzas armadas estatales que siempre nos apoyan*").

The Colectivo has worked to bring to justice those responsible in high-profile cases of human rights violations, often implicating senior members of the armed forces. As a result, members of the organizations have repeatedly been subject to paramilitary death threats and criticisms made by senior government officials. In February 2004, President Uribe criticized a member of the *Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo"*, during a session of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the European parliament which both were attending. President Uribe was reported to have accused the man of "hiding behind your human rights work in order to defend the guerrilla" (*que se escuda detrás de su calidad de organización de derechos humanos para defender a la guerrilla.*)

The email ends by stating that this is the first notice these organizations will receive, and that "If all those to whom we are sending this warning do not align themselves to this reality it would be better for you to go elsewhere with your humanitarian ideas ... This is your first warning". (*Todas las partes a las que hoy escribimos copia de este aviso si no se alinean a esta realidad es mejor que se larguen con sus ideas humanitarias a otra parte...Este es el primer aviso.*)

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

- expressing concern that a paramilitary group has sent a death threat to the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo"*, and copied it to the *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC)*, *Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Alternativos (ILSA)*, *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT)*, and *Plataforma Colombiana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo*;
- urging the authorities to take effective action, deemed appropriate by the members of these organizations themselves, to protect them so they may continue their legitimate and important work in the defence of human rights in safety;
- calling on the government to investigate all threats against human rights defenders and to bring those responsible to justice;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice, in line with the human rights recommendations of the UN;
- calling on the authorities to elaborate policy and plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders, regarding the implementation of the principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and to make these plans public.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 337 5890**

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

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, Ministro del Interior y de Justicia, Ministerio del Interior, Av. Jiménez No 8-89, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 560 4630**

**Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro**

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Iguarán, Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación, Diagonal 22B 52-01, Edificio C Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 414 9108**

**Salutation: Dear Dr Iguarán / Estimado Dr. Iguarán**

**COPIES 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 23 June 2006.