

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Colombian human rights defender Berenice Celeita was kept under surveillance by unidentified individuals after returning from a visit to the USA and Canada to expose human rights violations in Colombia.

From the evening of 20 June until the early hours of 21 June, a vehicle was parked outside the home of human rights defender **Berenice Celeita** (also sometimes spelled Celeyta) in Bogotá, the capital. From her window she saw that the two occupants sitting at the front of the vehicle were taking photographs of her house and she saw a camera flash firing.

Berenice Celeita called the local police to report the incident and the vehicle immediately drove away. Berenice Celeita is the director of the Research and Social Action Association (Asociación para la Investigación y Acción Social, **NOMADESC**), a non-governmental human rights organization that works in south-western Colombia and is based in the city of Cali. The human rights defender had just returned from a tour to the USA and Canada during which she was exposing human rights violations in Colombia and, amongst other issues, spoke about the serious human rights situation in Buenaventura and the importance of bringing to justice international economic and other interests which have benefitted from and have been responsible for human rights abuses and violations that have occurred during the course of Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict.

In the past, human rights defenders who have been under surveillance, including by the security forces, have subsequently been physically attacked. NOMADESC has been the repeated target of death threats in recent years.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Berenice Celeita and other members of NOMADESC and calling on the authorities to ensure protection measures for them in strict accordance with their wishes;
- Urging the authorities to order full and impartial investigations into the incidents, publish the results and prosecute those responsible;
- Reminding the authorities to fulfil their obligations to ensure human rights defenders can carry out their work without fear, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 7 AUGUST 2015 TO:

President

Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente de la República
 Casa de Nariño
 Calle 7. No 6-54.
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631
**Salutation: Dear President Santos/
 Excmo. Sr. Presidente Santos**

Minister of Defence

Señor Luis Carlos Villegas
 Ministerio de Defensa
 Carrera 54, no.26-29
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 266 1003
**Salutation: Dear Minister /
 Sr. Ministro**

And copies to:

Local human rights organization
 NOMADESC
 Carrera 9 No 4-53
 Barrio San Antonio
 Cali, Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During Colombia's long-running armed conflict, members of human rights organizations, trade unions and other social organizations have often been labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and paramilitaries. As a result they are often killed, threatened or subjected to enforced disappearance. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders they consider to be siding with the enemy.

Berenice Celeita and other members of NOMADESC have been repeatedly threatened over many years. NOMADESC has been campaigning for justice in cases of serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions. NOMADESC has also been working closely with Afro-descendant, Indigenous and peasant farmer communities who have faced serious human rights violations committed by paramilitaries and the security forces in the context of the development of large-scale economic projects, including projects in the mining, hydroelectric or agro-industrial sectors.

Buenaventura is an important port on the Colombian Pacific Coast in the department of Valle del Cauca. There are a number of large-scale infrastructure projects being developed in the city, which still has a strong presence of paramilitary groups that have been able to operate despite the presence of large contingents of security forces personnel. There have been reports of numerous killings, forced displacements and forced disappearances in the city. The bodies are often dumped in clandestine cemeteries or in the sea, which means that the whereabouts of many of the victims remain unknown.

Despite the strong presence of the security forces, paramilitaries have been able to operate continuously with little effective action by the authorities to stop their activities. Witnesses have stated that although the security forces know who the paramilitaries are and where the paramilitary commanders live, they have taken no decisive action to confront them. Similarly, the authorities know where the houses used by paramilitaries to kill their victims are located, as well as where the clandestine cemeteries used by the paramilitaries are situated.

Name: Berenice Celeita (f) and other members of NOMADESC
Gender m/f: both

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