

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 51/91

Fear of "Disappearance"

13 February 1991

COLOMBIA : Mercedes GAVIRIA CASTRO, aged 25
María Magdalena CASTRO SALAZAR, aged 27

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Mercedes Gaviria Castro and María Magdalena Castro Salazar, who were last seen on 24 January 1991 in Cali, Valle del Cauca department.

According to reports Mercedes Gaviria Castro, a 25-year-old student, and María Magdalena Castro Salazar, aged 27, were last seen at the Plaza 50 shopping centre in Cali on 24 January 1991. Mercedes Gaviria Castro had gone to Plaza 50 with her friend, María Magdalena Castro, who had an appointment there regarding a job as a childminder.

Mercedes Gaviria Castro, a student of philosophy (filosofía y letras) and student activist at the University of Valle had received repeated anonymous threats, warning her to stop her student activities.

Despite efforts by relatives and local human rights groups to locate the two women, their whereabouts remain unknown. Local human rights activists have denounced their possible "disappearance" to the regional procurator.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years Amnesty International has received an increasing number of reports of human rights violations in Colombia, including "disappearances". Local human rights groups estimate that over 1,800 people have "disappeared" and remain unaccounted for since 1980. Principal targets have been people associated with trade unions, civic and community movements and legal left-wing parties, as well as alleged members of or sympathisers with armed opposition groups. Amnesty International is not always in a position to establish responsibility for each individual "disappearance", as perpetrators are often not fully identified. However, on the basis of available evidence the organization concludes that many such abuses are carried out by members of the Colombia security forces or civilians working under their command. Cali has been particularly affected by "disappearances" in recent months.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the possible "disappearance" of Mercedes Gaviria Castro and María Magdalena Castro Salazar, in the case of Mercedes Gaviria following repeated threats in connection with her student activities;
- urging that there be an immediate investigation to establish their whereabouts;
- urging that if in detention, their legal situation be clarified and they be immediately released unless charged with a recognizably criminal offence and also allowed access to a lawyer and relatives;
- urging that they be humanely treated while in detention.

APPEALS TO:

Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Presidente Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7324; + 57 1 287 7937; + 57 1 283 3066

General Oscar Botero Restrepo
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52
Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO or 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: +57 1 222 1874

Dr. Gustavo Arrieta
Procurador General de la Nación
Edificio Banco Ganadero
Carrera 5, No. 15-80
Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General Gómez, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 41224 PRGEN CO or 41213 PGNDP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 0472

COPIES TO:

Dra Zylia Márquez
Calle 2, 38 D, 37
Cali
Valle del Cauca
COLOMBIA

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 March 1991.