

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 63/92 Death Threats

20 February 1992

COLOMBIA:Members of Regional Human Rights Committee in Barrancabermeja

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the members of the Regional Human Rights Committee, Comité Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (CREDDHOS) of Barrancabermeja, Santander department, who have increasingly been the victims of human rights violations, including possible extrajudicial executions, threats and harassment by state forces and paramilitary groups. Although CREDDHOS has received threats from paramilitary groups and local military commanders over a number of years, threats and harassment have intensified in recent months and two members of CREDDHOS have already been killed in circumstances suggesting they may have been extrajudicially executed.

CREDDHOS worker Humberto Hernández was shot dead in March 1991; those responsible have not been brought to justice. On 29 January 1992 Blanca Cecilia Valero de Durán, CREDDHOS' secretary, was killed outside the Committee's offices, shot by armed men in civilian clothes. Although the killing took place ten metres from a police station, the police reportedly made no attempts to intervene or to capture those responsible (see UA 34/92, AMR 23/03/92, 31 January 1992).

Following the killing of Blanca Valero, death threats by paramilitary organizations against the Committee members have increased. The recent wave of threats followed statements made by local military commanders accusing CREDDHOS of links to guerrilla organizations.

In an interview published in the local press on 16 February 1992 following Blanca Valero's killing Roberto Emilio Cifuentes, the Commander of the army's Vth Brigade based in Bucaramanga, Santander department, was quoted as saying,

"The Human Rights office [CREDDHOS] through naivety, or through the hostile intentions of some of its members, has been used by the guerrillas to carry out one of its methods of attack, based on slander ... There is no support for this performance. Some of these people appear unwisely to be taking part in a plot to undermine the [armed forces] institution, to create a state of general unease which might lead to violence."

"La oficina de Derechos Humanos en forma ingenua o de pronto algunos de sus miembros en forma malintencionada, ha sido utilizada por la subversión para ejercer unas de sus formas de lucha, que se basa en la calumnia ... Lo afirmo porque todo es un montaje que no tiene respaldo. Parte de esas personas incautamente estan haciendo eco de una tramoya para buscar el desprestigio de la institución, crear un estado de malestar general que conduce a la violencia."

The work of CREDDHOS in defence of human rights in the conflict-torn region of the Magdalena Medio has achieved international recognition. Amongst other activities, the Committee regularly denounces human rights violations believed to have been committed by the armed and security forces and paramilitary groups operating under their command or with their support. CREDDHOS also denounces human rights violations committed by guerrilla forces

operating in the region. In recent weeks CREDDHOS has publicly expressed serious concern about the escalation of human rights abuses, including enforced recruitment, torture, extrajudicial execution and "disappearance" committed by the Colombian army and police forces and paramilitary organizations working with them, against members of the civilian population. CREDDHOS denounces that 71 people from Barrancabermeja and the surrounding area have already been killed this year. At least 40 were killed in circumstances suggesting official responsibility.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The largely rural area of the Magdalena Medio in central Colombia has been a focus of political violence for several years following the emergence of guerrilla groups in the 1960s and the subsequent militarization of the region during the 1980s. Despite the progress that has been made through peace talks between several of the guerrilla groups and the government, there has been a continuation of political violence. In areas where guerrilla forces are active, the local population is often perceived by the armed forces as potential guerrilla collaborators and has, as a result, been subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution by army personnel and paramilitary forces. Principal victims have included members of legal left-wing political parties, community and civic leaders and trade unionists. Human rights groups attempting to support victims and denounce abuses have frequently been accused by high-ranking army commanders of links with subversive groups and have themselves increasingly come under attack.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters

- expressing concern for the safety of all members of the Regional Human Rights Committee of Barrancabermeja, following serious threats against their lives;
- urging that there be an immediate investigation into the death threats against them in order to identify those responsible and bring them to justice;
- urging that the Colombian government take all possible measures to protect the lives of human rights workers and ensure that they are able to carry out their lawful activities.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of the Republic:
Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Presidente Gaviria, Bogota, Colombia
Telexes: 44281 PALP CO
Faxes: + 57 1 283 3066
+ 57 1 286 7324
+ 57 1 287 7937
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Gaviria

2) Minister of Defence:
Dr. Rafael Pardo Rueda
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogota, Colombia
Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

3) Minister of Justice:
Fernando Carillo
Ministro de Justicia
Ministerio de Justicia
Carrera 15, No 9-63
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Ministro Justicia, Bogota Colombia
Faxes: + 57 1 288 49 06
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

4) Procurator General:

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

**Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta,
Bogota, Colombia**

**Telexes: 41224 PRGEN CO or
41213 PGNDP CO**

Faxes: + 57 1 284 0472

**Salutation: Sr. Procurador General de la
Nación / Dear Dr. Arrieta**

5) Commander of the Vth Brigade:

Brigadier General Roberto Emilio Cifuentes
Comandante de la V Brigada
Calle 14, Carrera 33
Bucaramanga
Santander, Colombia

**Telegrams: Comandante 5-Brigada,
Bucaramanga, Colombia**

**Salutation: Sr. Brigadier General /
Dear Sir**

6) Commander of the National Police:

Mayor Comandante Jaime Orozco Gómez
Comandante de la Policía Nacional
Carrera 2, No. 10-03
Barrancabermeja
Santander, Colombia

**Telegrams: Comandante Policia Nacional,
Barrancabermeja, Colombia**

**Salutation: Sr. Mayor Comandante /
Dear Sir**

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

CREDDHOS
AA 505
Barrancabermeja
Santander, 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 2 April 1992.