

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 23/11/96

UA 53/96

Fear for Safety

29 February 1996

COLOMBIA

Margarita ARREGOCÉS (f), teacher, popular activist
Lina María ARREGOCÉS (f), teacher, popular activist
Reinaldo Villalba, human rights lawyer

On 28 February 1996, a written death threat addressed to Margarita Arregocés, was received by human rights lawyer, Reinaldo Villalba. The threat was in the form of an invitation to a funeral mass for Margarita Arregocés to be held on 29 February. It was signed by a paramilitary group called *Colombia sin Guerrilla* (COLSINGUE), Colombia without Guerrillas.

The death threat was sent to the office of Reinaldo Villalba and was received just before an appeal court ordered the immediate and unconditional release of Margarita Arregocés and her sister Lina María, who have been in detention since November 1995. The two sisters were arrested in Planadas de Mosquera, department of Cundinamarca, accused of "*concierto de delinquir*", "conspiracy to commit a crime" and of being members of the armed opposition group, the *Frente 53 de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, 53 Front of the Colombian Armed Revolutionary Forces.

Margarita and Lina María Arregocés are both teachers working in poor communities and had founded the *Liceo de Sabana* - Sabana School in Planadas de Mosquera, department of Cundinamarca. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for their safety, given that in the past people who have been detained and accused of subversion by the security forces and then released by the courts have become the victim of human rights violations at the hands of the security forces and their paramilitary allies.

There is also serious concern for the safety of Reinaldo Villalba. As the judicial investigations into the charges against the two women are confidential, it is not clear how it is known that Reinaldo Villalba is the lawyer representing the sisters. The fact that the death threat was sent to his office is seen as a veiled death threat against him. Lawyers representing people accused of subversion are often accused of being guerrilla sympathisers, accusations which are often followed by extrajudicial execution, or at times "disappearance".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years widespread and systematic human rights violations have occurred in Colombia, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearance", torture and arbitrary arrest. Teachers and popular activists together with peasant farmers are amongst those who have frequently been the victims of human rights violations. President Ernesto Samper Pizano, who assumed office on 7 August 1994, has publicly stated that tackling the human rights situation will be a priority for his government. However, members of the Colombian armed and security forces, together with their paramilitary allies, continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Only exceptionally are perpetrators brought to justice; the vast majority of members of the armed and security forces responsible for gross human rights violations remain in active service.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Margarita Arregocés who was sent a death threat on 28 February 1995, her lawyer, Reinaldo Villalba and her sister Lina María Arregocés;

- urging that full and impartial investigations are undertaken into the death threat, that the results of these be made public and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- urging that immediate action be undertaken to dismantle the paramilitary group COLSINGUE, that those members responsible for human rights violations be brought to justice together with members of the security forces responsible for collaborating with the paramilitary group, such a move would be in line with governmental commitments to dismantle paramilitary groups.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 carrera 8 No. 7-26
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 289 3377/286 7434

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe
 Ministro del Interior
 Ministerio del Interior
 Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
 Santafé de Bogotá
 COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior Serpa, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Faxes:+ 57 1 286 00 53/ 286 04 85

Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Calle 35 No. 4-31
 Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá
 Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 245 5292 or 287 0939 or 288 2828

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso

Procurator General:

Dr. Orlando Vásquez Velásquez
 Procurador General de la Nación
 Procuraduría General
 Edificio Banco Ganadero
 Carrera 5, No. 15-80
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General Vásquez, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 342 9723/281 7531/284 0472/

Salutation:Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Vásquez

COPIES TO:

Lawyers' Association:
Corporación Colectivo de Abogados
AA 44456
Santafé de 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 25 April 1996.