

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/012/01

UA 31/01

Fear for safety / Death Threats

2 February 2001

COLOMBIA

Oscar RODAS VILLEGAS, human rights lawyer  
His family

---

There is great concern for the safety of human rights lawyer Oscar Rodas Villegas and his family, after his girlfriend was abducted and beaten, and warned that he has two weeks to give up his work and leave the area.

Olga Iliana Velez was abducted by three men and a woman, all armed, in Medellín, Antioquia department, in the afternoon of 24 January. She was forced into a car, gagged and blindfolded. Her captors took her to a house where they beat her. They threatened to attack Oscar Rodas Villegas's family, referring to his daughter in particular, if he did not stop his work. They also asked if Oscar Rodas Villegas had not understood their message four months ago. In September 2000 his brother Juan Fernando died in what is now feared to have been a political killing.

They let her go late in the afternoon, with a message for Oscar Rodas that he has until 17 February to leave ("*para perderse*").

Oscar Rodas works with the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'*, José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective. He and his colleagues there have received a number of threats in the past few years for their human rights work, and several have had to leave Colombia in fear for their lives.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Many human rights lawyers have been killed in Colombia, and others have been forced into exile. Human rights defenders who have sought to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations, and sought to expose the links between the security forces and paramilitary forces, have frequently themselves become victims of human rights violations. The security forces and their paramilitary allies have a policy of labeling human rights defenders as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, so they can present them as legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war.

Paramilitary groups backed by the army have killed several thousand civilians over the past five years alone, and continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights lawyer Oscar Rodas Villegas and his family, after his girlfriend Olga Iliana Velez was abducted on 24 January;
- calling for a full, independent and impartial investigation into the abduction of Olga Iliana Velez, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take effective and appropriate action to ensure the safety of Oscar Rodas Villegas and other members of the *Colectivo de Abogados* so they can carry out their legitimate and important work for the defence of human rights in safety;
- urging the Colombian government to adhere to its obligations regarding human rights defenders, as laid out in the UN *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* adopted on 9 December 1998, the Organization of American States *Human Rights Defenders in the Americas* resolution adopted on 7 June 1999 [AG/RES. 1671 (XXIX-O/99)] and in line with repeated recommendations made by the UN to the Colombian government to take measures to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups in line with stated government commitments and UN recommendations.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango  
Presidente de la República  
Palacio de Nariño  
Carrera 8 No.7-26  
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

**Fax: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351**

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

Vice-President of the Republic

Señor Vicepresidente Gustavo Bell Lemus  
Alto Consejero Presidencial para asuntos de Derechos Humanos y lucha Contra  
la Corrupción  
Cra. 8 #7-26, Palacio de Nariño,  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Faxes: + 57 1 337 1350 / 337 1351**

**Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente / Dear Vice-President**

Minister of Interior

Señor Humberto De La Calle  
Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Palacio Echeverry  
Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o., Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia**

**Fax: + 57 1 341 9583 / 334 3960**

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

**COPIES TO:**

*Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'*  
Apartado Aéreo 33035  
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 16 March 2001.