

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/014/2005

16 May 2005

UA 125/05

Fear for safety/ Death Threat

COLOMBIA

Soraya Gutiérrez Arguello (f), President of the non-governmental human rights organization *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'*, José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective
Her family
Other members of the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'*

A death threat has been delivered to Soraya Gutiérrez Arguello, President of the non-governmental human rights organization *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'*, José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective. Amnesty International believes that she, her family and other members of the organization are in grave danger.

On 13 May, when Soraya Gutiérrez Arguello arrived at the housing complex where she lives, in the capital, Bogotá, the security guard gave her a suspicious package that had been delivered by a courier company. Fearing that it could be a letter-bomb, Soraya called the police, who opened the package.

Inside the box there was a decapitated doll cut into pieces. Parts of the doll's body had been burnt and red nail varnish had been painted on its body to look like blood. A cross had been drawn on the doll. There was also a handwritten death threat: "*Usted tiene una familia muy linda cuidela no la sacrifique*" (You have a nice family look after it and do not sacrifice it).

The same day, an advertisement appeared in the national newspaper *El Tiempo*, purporting to be from the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective. It called for lawyers, psychologists, sociologists, other professionals and students seeking jobs to contact the organization for immediate employment, and contained the organization's telephone numbers.

According to the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective, the advertisement contains an implicit threat, as it suggests that there will be soon be vacancies in the organization.

On 14 May a similar advertisement had been placed in the same newspaper, this time looking for security guards for the organization, giving a meeting time and place for prospective candidates. The organization was not involved in placing either advertisement, and believes the appeal for security guards could be intended to indicate that the organization is under serious threat. This concern was heightened by the fact that the place and time given in the advert were those of a meeting between the organization and victims of human rights violations. This makes clear that the organization is under close surveillance.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over the years the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'* has sought to bring to justice members of the security forces, including senior officers, implicated in serious human rights violations committed directly by the security forces or in coordination with their paramilitary allies. Among the high-profile cases on which the *Corporación* has worked is the Chengue paramilitary massacre of 2001, in which 26 peasant farmers were killed.

Many human rights lawyers have been killed in Colombia, and others have been forced to flee the country in fear for their lives. Human rights defenders who have condemned human rights violations by the armed

forces or their paramilitary allies, and have sought to bring those responsible to justice, or to expose the links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, have frequently been harassed or killed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Soraya Gutiérrez Arguello, President of the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'*, who received a death threat on 13 May, her family and other members of the organization
- calling for full and impartial investigations into this death threat and the other threats against the organization, for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take effective action to protect Soraya Gutiérrez Arguello, her family and other members of the organization, as they have requested, thus allowing them to continue their legitimate and important work in defence of human rights in safety;
- urging the government to fully implement the principles of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
- calling on the government to investigate all threats against human rights defenders and bring those responsible to justice, and to initiate a meaningful dialogue with human rights defenders to determine how to protect them from attack.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 337 5890

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

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega,

Ministro del Interior y de Justicia

Ministerio del Interior

Av. Jiménez No 8-89

Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 560 4630

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,

Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2000 (you will hear a message in Spanish asking you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:

'José Alvear Restrepo' Lawyers' Collective

Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo',

AA 33035

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