

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

COLOMBIA

Members of human rights organization *Reiniciar*
Members of left-wing political party *Unión Patriótica*
Family of Higinio Baquero Mahecha

A bodyguard employed through a government protection program to protect the head of the human rights organization *Reiniciar* has been shot and killed, and other staff of the organisation are believed to be in danger. The man killed was the son of an activist for a left-wing political party, and its members may also be targets. The gunmen are thought to be members of a paramilitary organization.

Bodyguard Higinio Baquero Mahecha had been assigned to *Reiniciar* executive director Jahel Quiroga Carrillo, as part of the protection measures the government provided to the organisation at the request of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). On 12 April he apparently left the *Reiniciar* offices in the capital, Bogotá, and caught a bus to the district of the city where he lived. Two gunmen got on the bus shortly afterwards, and shot him several times in the head. He was taken to hospital, where he died after six hours of treatment.

Reiniciar has campaigned for justice for the families of over 3000 members of the left-wing political party *Unión Patriótica* (UP), Patriotic Union, who were killed or "disappeared" since the party was formed in 1985, mostly at the hands of the security forces and army-backed paramilitaries. Jahel Quiroga and other members of *Reiniciar* have been repeatedly threatened possibly by paramilitary organizations, which is what led the IACHR to ask for protection for them.

Higinio Baquero's father was an activist for the UP, which is closely linked to the *Partido Comunista Colombiano* (PCC), Colombian Communist Party. He was reportedly killed in 2004 in the department of Meta. Because of the killing Higinio Baquero moved to Bogotá with his wife and children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UP and PCC members and activists have frequently been labelled guerrilla sympathizers and collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Such accusations have frequently been followed by serious human rights violations including extrajudicial executions and "disappearances". Human rights defenders and others campaigning for justice in cases of human rights violations against PCC and UP activists and many other cases have similarly been the target of serious human rights violations. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for killing and threatening civilians they consider to be collaborating with their enemies.

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

- expressing concern that a bodyguard **employed to protect** *Reiniciar* executive director Jahel Quiroga Carrillo was shot dead on 12 April;
- expressing concern for the safety of *Reiniciar* members and the family of the bodyguard, Higinio Baquero Mahecha;
- urging the authorities to take action to guarantee their safety, and provide them with adequate protection, in accordance with their wishes, so that *Reiniciar* members may continue their legitimate work in safety;

- calling on the authorities to conduct an immediate, impartial and full investigation of the killing, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- reminding the authorities that their obligations to human rights defenders are laid out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Organization of American States Human Rights Defenders in the Americas resolutions and in repeated recommendations made to them by the UN.

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. Mario Iguarán

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

Diagonal 22B 52-01, Edificio C Piso 4

Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 414 9108

Salutation: Dear Dr Iguarán / Estimado Dr. Iguarán

COPIES 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 1 June 2006.