

PUBLIC

UA 165/07 Fear for safety

COLOMBIA **Members of human rights NGO *Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro***

The office of human rights NGO *Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro* in Bogotá has been broken into and information about the organisation's members and their work with forcibly displaced people has been stolen. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the organisation's staff and for those victims supported by the organisation.

The office was reportedly broken into in the early hours of 22 June. Five computer hard drives and a laptop containing information about the organisation and its work were stolen, as well as video equipment.

The *Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro* provides legal help to people forced to flee their homes by Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict, and Amnesty International is concerned that the break-in may have been politically motivated. The intruders ignored cash and cheque books, but searched paper files containing information on cases of displacement, taking two of them: one about people displaced by a mining project, the other about people displaced by an energy company.

The *Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro* reported the break-in to the authorities, but it is not known whether there has been any investigation. In the days leading up to the break-in, staff of the organisation reportedly found themselves being watched on their way to and from work. The security forces or their paramilitary allies have regularly kept human rights defenders under surveillance in this way before attacking them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The work of organisations like the *Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro*, defending and promoting human rights, puts them at particular risk of attack and intimidation, especially in situations like the internal armed conflict in Colombia.

More than 3 million people have been forcibly displaced since 1985 during Colombia's long-running internal conflict. This takes place especially in areas of economic interest, such as mining areas, which both sides in the conflict want to control.

This break-in at the offices of the *Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro* is the third break-in at the office of a non-governmental human rights organisation in less than a month.

On 2 June, the Bogotá offices of the US-based NGO Fellowship of Reconciliation were broken into. Two computers which contained information about the organisation's local partner organisations were stolen, and also reports on human rights abuses against local communities.

On 14 June, two other computers were stolen in another break-in at the offices of the human rights NGO *Centro Cristiano para la Justicia, Paz y Acción No Violenta (Justapaz)*, the Christian Centre for Justice, Peace and Non-violent Action.

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

- expressing concern for the members of the NGO *Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro*, whose office was broken into and computer equipment stolen on 22 June;
- urging the authorities to take effective action, as deemed appropriate by the members of this organisation themselves, to protect them so they may continue their legitimate and important work in the defence of human rights without fear of intimidation;
- calling on the authorities to order full and impartial investigations into the break-in, to make the results public and to bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to produce policy and plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders, to guarantee their safety according to the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and to make these plans public.

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

+57 1 342 0592

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

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Dr. Carlos Holguín Sardi

Ministro del Interior y Justicia

Ministerio Del Interior Y De Justicia, Carrera 9a. No. 14-10, Bogotá D.C. Colombia

Fax: +57 1 560 46 30

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Sir

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C, Piso 4

Bogotá, Colombia

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

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Fiscal/Dear Mr Iguarán

COPIES TO:

Non- governmental human rights organisation

Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro

Carrera 10 No 15-39 oficina 507

Bogotá

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 8 August 2007.
