

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/021/2006

10 May 2006

UA 130/06

Fear for safety

COLOMBIA

**Iván Cepeda (m) human rights defender, journalist
Embarth Barrios Guzmán (m) driver for Iván Cepeda
Other members of the *Fundación Manuel Cepeda Vargas*, Manuel Cepeda Vargas
Foundation**

Human rights defender Iván Cepeda received a death threat by email on 30 April from a new paramilitary group calling itself the *Autodefensas Campesinas Nueva Generación* (ACNG), New Generation of Peasant Self-Defence. The same email was also posted on the internet readers' forum of the column he writes for the Bogotá daily newspaper *El Espectador*. His driver, Embarth Barrios Guzmán, is reportedly under surveillance, and Amnesty International believes both men's lives are in danger.

Human rights NGOs have suffered repeated death threats over the last year: a bodyguard protecting the director of human rights NGO Reiniciar was shot dead in April 2006. (See UA 95/06, AMR 23/016/2006, 20 April 2006.)

Iván Cepeda is one of the founders of the human rights organisation *Fundación Manuel Cepeda*. It is named after his father, who was killed in 1994 in a joint attack by members of the armed forces and paramilitaries while he was a senator for the left-wing party *Unión Patriótica*, Patriotic Union. The *Fundación*, and Iván Cepeda himself, play an important role within the NGO coalition *Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes del Estado*, National Movement of Victims of State Crimes, which campaigns for the surviving relatives of all those killed by the army or their paramilitary allies in the four decades of civil conflict. In the column Iván Cepeda writes for *El Espectador*, he discusses the defence of human rights and in particular, criticises the supposed demobilization of the country's paramilitary groups and the impunity this process threatens to give to human rights violators, the limited opportunities given to victims to seek justice, and the role of the State in trying to hide violations of human rights.

The email reads: "the reason for our existence is more valid than before, the defence of liberty and Colombian democracy and until the last rifle belonging to the guerrilla, oppressors of the Colombian people, is put down will we continue in arms, combating the guerrilla utilizing all the means we have at our disposal. For a free, honourable, just and peaceful Colombia. We are all members of self-defence groups. Autodefensas Campesinas Nueva Generación (ACNG)."

"Nuestra razón de ser hoy esta mas (sic.) vigente que nunca, la defensa de la libertad y la democracia Colombiana (sic.) y hasta que no cese el ultimo (sic.) fusil guerrillero opresor del pueblo Colombiano (sic.) seguiremos en armas combatiendo la guerrilla utilizando todos los medios que estén a nuestro alcance. Por una Colombia libre, digna, justa y en paz. Autodefensas somos todos. Estado Mayor Autodefensas Campesinas Nueva Generación, ACNG".

Iván Cepeda's driver, Embarth Barrios Guzmán, has reported that a white truck was parked in front of his house on 6 May. When someone came out of the house, the two men in the truck made sure their faces could not be seen. Embarth Barrios Guzmán has seen the same truck outside his house at least three times before.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

An internal conflict has raged in Colombia over the last four decades between guerrilla forces and government security forces. The armed forces have sought to contain the guerrillas through a strategy

involving systematic violation of human rights, and have relied heavily on paramilitary groups to implement their "dirty war" tactics, including torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions.

ACNG is thought to be a new name for army-backed paramilitaries. Although a government-sponsored process supposedly seeking to demobilize paramilitary groups is drawing to an end this year, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups operating with the cooperation of the security forces in different parts of the country. Using new names for these groups appears to be part of a strategy to cover up the fact that paramilitary structures have not actually demobilised. Recent statements made by paramilitary organizations acknowledge that their military structures remain intact.

Human rights organizations are frequently labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. These organizations are thus presented as legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war. As a result they often suffer disappearance, murder or torture at the hands of army-backed paramilitary groups, or members of the security forces. Armed opposition groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Iván Cepeda, Embarth Barrios Guzmán and other members of the *Fundación Manuel Cepeda*;
- urging the authorities to take effective action to protect them in line with measures they have themselves requested, thus allowing them to continue their legitimate and important work in the defence of human rights in safety;
- calling for the government to investigate all threats against human rights defenders and to bring those responsible to justice;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice in line with the human rights recommendations of 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 21 June 2006.