

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/22/98

UA 122/98

20 April 1998

COLOMBIA     **Fear for safety: Human Rights Defenders**

**Extrajudicial execution: Dr. Eduardo Umaña Mendoza**

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The killing of Dr. Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, one of Colombia's most prominent human rights lawyers, on 18 April 1998, has heightened Amnesty International's fears for the safety of all human rights defenders in the country.

Human rights defenders have in recent years faced increasing harassment and intimidation, which in some cases has been followed by attacks on their lives. Those who have denounced human rights violations committed by the security forces or their paramilitary allies have themselves often been the target of serious human rights violations. Similarly those who have made public the close links between security forces and paramilitary forces have been accused of being guerrilla sympathizers and been the victims of death threats and serious human rights violations.

Dr. Umaña was a leading human rights activist for over 20 years and helped to found a number of Colombia's national non-governmental human rights organizations. As a human rights lawyer, Dr. Umaña represented numerous political prisoners and sought justice in many high-profile cases. He vigorously condemned the responsibility of the security forces in human rights violations and the high level of impunity which benefits those responsible for human rights violations. He denounced the Military Justice System as a mechanism of impunity.

Over the last year several human rights activists have been killed. Most recently, on 27 February 1998, Jesús María Valle Jaramillo, the director of the *Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de Antioquia*, CPDH, Antioquia Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, a widely respected non-governmental human rights organization, was shot dead in his office in Medellín.

Throughout the presidency of Ernesto Samper Pizano, the Colombian Government has made repeated commitments to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders, yet, in spite of this, his government has continuously failed to take the effective action necessary to safeguard their physical integrity. The killing of Dr Umaña is testimony of the government's failure to take adequate action.

Amnesty International calls upon the government of President Samper to stand by its commitments and ensure that human rights workers can carry out their lawful activities, without fear for their own lives or those of their families.

The recent 54th session of the UN Commission for Human Rights urged the Colombian government to give special importance to the safety of human rights workers. The session called on the government to implement the recommendations contained in the Report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which, inter alia, urges the proper recognition of the right of human rights advocates to conduct their activities without fear for their lives. Amnesty International is concerned that, if measures in line with these recommendations and proposals made by Colombian NGOs themselves, are not adhered to, all human rights defenders in Colombian will continue to be at serious risk.

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

- deploring the killing of Eduardo Umaña in his home on 18 April 1998 by three gunmen;
- expressing grave concern for the physical safety of all other human rights defenders in Colombia;
- calling on the Colombian Government to act immediately in implementing all those measures repeatedly requested by the human rights community to guarantee the physical safety of human rights defenders in Colombia;
- urging that there be a full and impartial investigation into the killing of Eduardo Umaña, that the results be made public and that all those responsible for planning as well as carrying out the attack be brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano  
Presidente de la República  
Palacio de Nariño  
carrera 8 No. 7-26  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Tx: 44281 PALP CO**

**Fax: + 57 1 284 2186/289 3377/286 7434**

**Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper**

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Alfonso López Caballero  
Ministro del Interior  
Ministerio del Interior  
Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2  
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

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

**Telexes:45406 MINGO CO**

**Fax:+ 57 1 281 5884/286 6524/286 0405**

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

Attorney General

Dr.Alfonso Gómez Méndez  
Fiscal General de la Nación  
Fiscalia General de la Nación  
Diagonal 22B 5201, Apartado Aéreo 29855  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams:Fiscal General, Fiscalia General, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Faxes:+ 571 570 2000 (when ansaphone picks up dial 2017 for fax)**

**Salutation: Estimado Dr./Dear Dr.**

**COPIES TO:**

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Human Rights Organization

Coordinación de Organización No Gubernamentales de Derechos Humanos  
Avenida Jiménez No. 8-49 Oficina 1001, 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 1 June 1998.