

PUBLIC

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UA 144/06 Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA Members of human rights NGO *Corporación COMPROMISO*

Paramilitaries have sent a death threat by email to a human rights organization based in the city of Bucaramanga, in the department of Santander. Amnesty International believes its staff are in danger.

The email was sent on 17 May to the *Corporación "COMPROMISO"*, which works to promote and protect human rights in the north-east of Colombia. It was copied to the indigenous organization *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia* (ONIC), the trade union *Unión Sindical Obrera*, and also to the human rights organizations *Viva la Ciudadanía Bogotá*, *Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento* (CODHES) and the *Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo"*.

The email was sent from the same email address used to send a threatening email to the *Colectivo de Abogados* on 8 May. The email address includes the words *Colombia Libre* ("Free Colombia") which is the name used by the paramilitary umbrella organization *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, on its website. This is the largest of the army-backed paramilitary organisation that are supposedly demobilising. (See UA 131/06, AMR 23/022/2006, 12 May 2006.)

The email calls on NGOs to join the "*nuevo proceso para favorecer la democracia en nuestra sagrada patria*" ("new process to favour democracy in our sacred homeland.") The email warns the threatened organizations to give up their human rights work and training, which they claim are a "*disfraz de la insurgencia izquierdista*" ("a front for the leftist insurgency.")

The email states "**YOU ARE ALL WARNED** that here we do not tolerate third-rate supposed lawyers ... leaders...human rights defenders...that only come to align the people to retrograde communist and subversive guerrilla thought, precisely when we have been able to clean our territories of these grovellers and servile idiots who harbour these intentions, **WE WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE** for the safety of anyone who comes with such a purpose."

(ESTAN TODOS ADVERTIDOS no toleramos aquí a supuestos abogaduchos de pacotilla... lideres... defensores de derecho humano... que solo vienen es a ALINEAR al pueblo al pensamiento comunista retrogrado y subversivo de la guerrilla, cuando precisamente hemos logrado limpiar de nuestro territorio a arrodillados e idiotas serviles de tal propósito, NO RESPONDEMOS por la integridad de nadie que venga con tal propósito.)

The email suggests that the AUC is still operating and continues to threaten the work and lives of members of NGOs that promote and protect human rights in Colombia.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Colombia's army-backed paramilitary groups have officially been demobilising, in a government-sponsored process that will supposedly be completed this year. Despite this, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups operating in coordination with the security forces. It appears that many paramilitary groups have not demobilized at all, but are continuing to operate under new names.

Human rights organizations are frequently labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. As a result they often suffer disappearance, killings 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 they consider to be siding with the enemy.

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

- expressing concern that a paramilitary group has sent a death threat to the *Corporación el Desarrollo del Oriente "COMPROMISO"*, *ONIC*, *Unión Sindical Obrera*, *Viva la Ciudadanía Bogotá*, *CODHES*, and the *Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo"*;
- urging the authorities to take effective action, deemed appropriate by the members of these organizations themselves, to protect them so they may continue their legitimate and important work in the defence of human rights in safety;
- calling on 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;
- 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 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, 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.7-26, 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:

Corporación COMPROMISO

Apartado Aereo 0538

Bucaramanga, Santander

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 2 July 2006.