

PUBLIC

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UA 148/06 Fear for safety

COLOMBIA **Members of the human rights organisation *Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento* (CODHES) and other human rights groups**

A paramilitary group has sent death threats to a prominent human rights organisation which works on issues relating to communities forcibly displaced by the armed conflict. This is thought to be one of the army-backed groups that have supposedly demobilised, but are continuing to operate under new names. Amnesty International believes the organisation's members are in danger.

The threat was sent by email on 20 May, from a group calling itself *Colombia Libre de Comunistas* (Colombia Free of Communists). It was sent to 20 organizations, including the *Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento* (CODHES), the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement, labelling them as communists and supporters of the left-wing guerrilla organisations FARC and ELN. Recently Amnesty International has issued Urgent Actions in response to similar death threats sent to the human rights organisations COMPROMISO and the *Colectivo de Abogados "Alvear Restrepo"*, and to students and staff at the University of Antioquia and the Industrial University of Santander. Among the other organizations who received the threat were the *Colectivo de Abogados "Alvear Restrepo"*, *Organización Indígena de Colombia* (ONIC), National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, and the *Organización Femenina Popular* (OFP), Popular Women's Organization.

The email warns the 20 organisations that "you are going to know something more about us now that we are to continue in power ... along with the legitimate Colombian armed forces clearing our countryside and cities of grovellers like you." (*"Ya sabran (sic) ustedes algo mas (sic) de nosotros ahora que continuaremos en el poder...de la mano de la fuerza armada legitima (sic) colombiana limpiando de nuestros campos y ciudades a arrodillados como ustedes."*)

The statement warns members of these organizations to "stop coming here and fucking around with your issue of human rights, education, inequality, and all those things that you have invented because here what we have is work to do...Clear our land of these unproductive elements...You are all warned, we know where you are". (*"Abstenganse (sic) de venir a seguir jodiendo con su tema de los derechos humanos y al (sic) educacion y las (sic) desigualdades (sic) y todo eso que se viven inventando, aquí (sic) lo que tenemos es trabajo que hacer...Limpiar de nuestra tierra a elementos improductivos (sic) como ustedes, (sic) Estan (sic) todos advertidos estas todos bien ubicados..."*) The death threat makes reference to the theft of computers, from the offices of various NGOs, including the office of CODHES, on 25 April.

There are reports that the same group sent a further death threat to CODHES and another 25 organizations on 24 May 2006. This death threat was also sent to a number of opposition presidential candidates. Eight of these groups, including CODHES, had also received the 20 May threat. Some of the people who received the 24 May threat were alleged to be on the staff of the opposition parties' presidential campaigns. The email claimed to be from an armed group "on the warpath" (*"en pie de lucha"*) against people who did not want the present government to continue in power.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Colombia's army-backed paramilitary groups have officially been demobilizing, 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 their enemies.

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 CODHES and several other human rights organizations, including the *Colectivo de Abogados "Alvear Restrepo"*, ONIC and the *Organización Femenina Popular*;
- urging the authorities to take effective action, as 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 authorities to order full and impartial investigations into all threats against human rights defenders, to make the results public 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:

Human rights NGO

CODHES, Carrera 6 No. 34-62 Oficina 302, 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 7 July 2006.