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Fear for safety / Extrajudicial execution

20 June 1995

COLOMBIA

Javier Alberto BARRIGA VERGEL, human rights lawyer

There are renewed fears for the safety of human rights defenders in Cúcuta city, Norte de Santander Department, after the killing of lawyer Javier Alberto Barriga Vergel.

At 8.30am on 16 June 1995 Javier Alberto Barriga left his house by car in the Los Barrios area of Cúcuta. He was shot dead with two bullets to the head by two unidentified armed men.

Javier Alberto Barriga was a member of the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo* (CCA), José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective, working for the *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos* (CSPP), Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners, in Cúcuta. The CSPP is working on numerous important cases of human rights violations in which members of the police and army are implicated, and its lawyers have repeatedly been subjected to death threats, harassment and physical attack because of their work. The killing of Javier Alberto Barriga has heightened fears that others involved with the CCA and the CSPP may be similarly targeted.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights lawyers and members of human rights organizations are increasingly at risk in Colombia, despite presidential promises to ensure their safety. On 9 September 1994, President Ernesto Samper Pizano declared in a speech that his government "would seek to have constructive relations with human rights organizations with the aim of suppressing human rights violations and would do everything necessary to protect the lives and the integrity of their members" ("*Buscará sostener con los organismos de derechos humanos relaciones constructivas en procura de suprimir las violaciones de tales derechos y pondrá de su parte cuanto sea necesario para proteger la vida y la integridad de sus miembros*").

Indeed, President Samper has repeatedly pledged his government's commitment to protect human rights and tackle impunity. However, members of the Colombian armed and security forces, together with their paramilitary allies, continue to commit serious violations with virtual impunity. Trade unionists, popular leaders, civic activists and human rights workers are amongst those frequently targeted. Only in exceptional circumstances are perpetrators brought to justice; the vast majority of members of the armed forces responsible for gross human rights violations remain in active service.

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

- expressing concern at the killing of human rights lawyer Javier Alberto Barriga Vergel on 16 June 1995 in circumstances suggesting that he was extrajudicially executed;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the killing, the results of which should be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging that, in line with President Samper's declared commitment to protect the lives of human rights defenders, all possible measures be taken to protect those working with the *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos* in Norte Santander region;

- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to dismantle paramilitary groups in line with stated governmental commitments.

APPEALS TO

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: President Samper, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes: 44281 PALP CO
Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434
Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

2) Procurator General:

Dr. Orlando Vásquez Velásquez
 Procurador General de la Nación
 Procuraduría General
 Edificio Banco Ganadero
 Carrera 5, No. 15-80
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Procurador General Velásquez, Bogotá, Colombia
Faxes:+ 57 1 342 9723 (may be taped office sounds, then engaged signal, then fax tone) / 284 0472 / 281 7531
Salutation:Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Velásquez

3) Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams:Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia
Faxes:+ 57 1 211 6676 or 288 2828 (may be taped voice, then short delay before fax tone)
Salutation: Estimado Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso

4) Minister of the Interior

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe
 Ministro de Gobierno
 Ministerio de Gobierno
 Carrera 8a, No.8-09, Piso 7⁰
 Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA
Telegrams: Ministro de Gobierno, Bogota, Colombia
Telexes:45406 MINGO CO
Faxes:57 1 286 8025 / 286 0053 / 286 0485
Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Lawyers' Association:

Corporación Colectivo de Abogados
AA 44456
Santa Fé de 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 August 1995.