

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

15 March 2002

COLOMBIA

**Pedro Mahecha (m), human rights lawyer**  
**Other members of the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'***

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A gunman has been found waiting near the home of human rights lawyer Pedro Mahecha, while he was presenting evidence of human rights violations in which the army may be implicated to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Amnesty International fears that an attempt on his life is being planned.

On 9 March a white taxi reportedly parked next to Pedro Mahecha's van, in a residential car park near his home in the northwest of Bogota. After several hours, the car park guard reportedly approached the car and asked the four people inside if they were authorized to be there. One man apparently called him a "viejo malparido" ("old bastard"), told him not to get involved and took out a sub-machine gun as if to fire. One of the others stopped him from shooting, and they drove away at speed.

Pedro Mahecha is a member of a lawyers' association that works on human rights cases, the *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'* (José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective), which is based in Bogotá. He was in Washington DC at the time of the incident, giving evidence on two cases in hearings before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

On 5 March he presented his allegations regarding the Pueblorrico case, where in August 2000 four children died and another six were injured in an incident involving the Colombian Army. The matter is being dealt with by the military justice system, and the *Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'* is asking for the case to be judged in a civil court.

On 6 March he presented his allegations that the government have taken insufficient measures to protect the *Organización Femenina Popular (OFP)*, Popular Women's Organization, who have been receiving death threats from army-backed paramilitaries in Barrancabermeja. He asked the Commission to insist on wider protection measures to guarantee the safety of OFP members.

Other members of the *Colectivo* are also in danger. In the past few days, several are reported to have been kept under surveillance and received anonymous phone calls. Members of the organization have received death threats on several occasions before now (see UA 88/01, AMR 23/043/2001, 6 April 2001).

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Many human rights lawyers have been killed in Colombia, and others have been forced into exile in fear for their lives. Human rights defenders who have sought to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations, and sought to expose the links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, have frequently suffered human rights violations themselves.

Paramilitary groups backed by the army have killed several thousand civilians in the past five years alone, and continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity.

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

- urging the Colombian authorities to take immediate and effective action to protect Pedro Mahecha;
- asking them also to take immediate and effective action to ensure that other members of the *Colectivo de Abogados* can carry out their legitimate and important work for the defence of human rights in safety;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations to human rights defenders, as laid out in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised

Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Organization of American States Human Rights Defenders in the Americas resolution and in repeated recommendations made to them by the UN;  
 - urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and UN recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

**Telegrams: Presidente de la República, Bogota, Colombia**

**Fax: + 57 1 566 2071**

**Salutation: Dear President Pastrana Arango / Excmo. Sr. Presidente Pastrana Arango**

Minister of Interior

Sr. Armando Estrada Villa

Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Palacio Echeverry

Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o., Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

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

**Fax: + 57 1 562 5298 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")**

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

Minister of Justice

Dr. Rómulo González Trujillo

Ministro de Justicia, Ministerio de Justicia

Avenida Jiménez, No.8-89

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegram: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 599 8404

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

**COPIES TO:**

*Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'*

Apartado Aéreo 33035, Santafé 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 26 April 2002.