

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/035/2001

26 March 2001

Further information on UA 22/01 (AMR 23/008/2001, 29 January 2001) and follow-up (AMR 23/028/2001, 8 March 2001) - Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA Women human rights activists of the *Organización Femenina Popular* (OFP), Women's Popular Organization

new names: Pablo Javier Arenales, human rights defender with the *Corporación Regional de Derechos Humanos* (CREDHOS), Regional Human Rights Corporation

Other CREDHOS workers

Army-backed paramilitaries are continuing raids throughout Barrancabermeja city. The women's grassroots organisation OFP is still operating, but has faced further threats and intimidation. CREDHOS, another other human rights organisation still operating in the city, has also faced further paramilitary threats in recent days.

In recent weeks delegations from the Colombian Congress and US Senate have visited Barrancabermeja. Amnesty International believes that this international attention focussed on Barrancabermeja is providing vital support to human rights organisations and helping them to continue their legitimate work, despite the threats against them.

On 23 March a group of paramilitary gunmen reportedly came to the house of Pablo Javier Arenales, who works for the *Corporación Regional de Derechos Humanos* (CREDHOS), Regional Human Rights Corporation, which is based in Barrancabermeja. They said they needed to speak to Pablo, and demanded to know where he was.

The following day a gunman went into the community centre run by the OFP. He found a woman preparing lunch, and asked her where the centre's coordinator was. When the woman told her she wasn't there, he snatched a knife from her and threatened her with it.

Pablo Javier Arenales and other CREDHOS workers have played a vital role in drawing international attention to human rights abuses committed by guerrillas, the security forces and their paramilitary allies. CREDHOS activists suffer continuous threats and harassment, and a number of have been killed or "disappeared". In October 2000, the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia) circulated pamphlets at a human rights conference which declared all CREDHOS activists to be "military targets", accused them of being "guerrillas" and warned them to "get out". (See UA 12/01, AMR 23/003/01, 18 January 2001; UA 307/00, AMR 23/80/00, 4 October 2000; UA 258/00, 23/063/00, 30 August 2000 and follow-ups; UA 82/00, AMR 23/020/00, 13 April 2000).

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

- expressing concern that army-backed paramilitaries have again intimidated and threatened workers of the *Organización Femenina Popular* (OFP) and urging the Colombian authorities to take action to protect all OFP human rights activists, in line with formal requests by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights;

- urging the authorities to take immediate action to protect Pedro Javier Arenales and other *Corporación Regional de Derechos Humanos* (CREDHOS) members, so they can continue to promote and protect human rights;
- asking them to order an immediate, impartial and full investigation into the threats, and bring those responsible to justice;
- expressing concern that although the authorities are fully informed about paramilitaries operating in Barrancabermeja, they have still taken no real action, and that although a special forces unit was recently sent into the city, supposedly to combat paramilitary groups, these groups have continued to operate with impunity;
- reminding the government of its obligations to human rights defenders, as laid out in United Nations (UN) and Organization of American States declarations, and urging it to follow repeated UN recommendations to take measures to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Barrancabermeja and the surrounding area, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice.

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

Fax: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351**Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente**Vice-President of the Republic

Señor Vicepresidente Gustavo Bell Lemus

Alto Consejero Presidencial para asuntos de Derechos Humanos y lucha Contra la Corrupción

Cra. 8 #7-26, Palacio de Nariño,

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 337 1350 / 337 1351**Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente / Dear Vice-President**Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia**Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO****Fax: + 57 1 222 1874****Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro**Governor of Santander Department

Gobernador del Departamento de Santander

Sr. Jorge Eliecer Gómez Villamizar

Gobernación de Santander

Calle 37, No. 10-30

Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 76 339889

Salutation:Dear Governor / Sr. Gobernador

COPIES TO:

CREDHOS

A.A 505

Barrancabermeja

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 7 May 2001.