

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats

3 October 1991

COLOMBIA: María Belarmina ROMERO Vda.* de PALACIOS

* Vda. signifies "widow"

Amnesty International is concerned about the physical safety of María Belarmina Romero Vda. de Palacios who has received serious threats to her life.

María Belarmina Romero was the only adult survivor of a massacre which took place on 18 August 1991 in the town of Fusagasugá, Cundinamarca department (please refer to UA 286/91, AMR 23/43/91, 21 August 1991). Her husband and four members of her immediate family, and two others were killed when some 30 members of the armed forces broke into her house in the early morning. A military communiqué from the Commander of the 13th Brigade of the Colombian Army subsequently alleged that the seven people killed were members of an armed opposition group and had been killed during an armed confrontation with the soldiers. However this version of events was contradicted by eye-witness reports and the findings of police and journalists who visited the scene shortly afterwards and who have repeatedly stated that there was no evidence that the people inside the house had fired upon their attackers.

María Belarmina Romero was unhurt in the attack and subsequently testified to a military investigating judge. At the end of September the military court No. 115 issued arrest warrants against seven members of the army's Artillery School, attached to the XIII Brigade, in connection with the killings.

Since the attack, María Belarmina Romero and other residents of Fusagasugá who were witness to the attack, have received continuous death threats. Only days after the massacre leaflets began to appear, decorated with a skull and pre-announcing the death in similar circumstances of María Belarmina, her remaining relatives and neighbours. Fearing for her life she has been forced to leave her home and take refuge.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

President César Gaviria Trujillo has repeatedly pledged his government's commitment to protect human rights. In his inaugural address in August 1990, he said that "the public opinion's trust and credibility in the armed forces depends on the armed forces acting according to the constitution. The armed forces must respect human rights because the country's defence also means upholding the law". However, despite the government's commitment to uphold respect for human rights, members of the Colombian armed forces have continued to commit serious abuses, including torture, extrajudicial execution and "disappearance".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern for the physical safety of María Belarmina Romero Vda. de Palacios and other witnesses to the killing of her relatives following the receipt of continuous death threats;

- urging that an immediate investigation be conducted into the death threats in order to identify those responsible and bring them to justice;

- requesting that all possible measures be taken to protect the lives of María Belarmina Romero Vda. de Palacios and other witnesses to the killing of her relatives.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic:

Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

Excelentísimo Sr Presidente

Telegrams: Presidente Gaviria, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 283 3066; + 57 1 286 7324; + 57 1 287 7937

Minister of Defence:

Dr. Rafael Pardo Rueda
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

Sr. Ministro

Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: +57 1 222 1874

Commander, 13th Brigade:

Brigadier General
Jesús María Vergara Aragón
Comandante de la XIII Brigada
Carrera 7, Calle 100
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Sr. Brigadier General

Telegrams: Comandante XIII Brigada, Bogota, Colombia

Procurator General:

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta Padilla
Procurador General de la Nación
Procuraduría General
Edificio Banco Ganadero
Carrera 5, No. 15-80
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

Sr Procurador General de la Nación

Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta, Bogota, Colombia
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COPIES TO:

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AA 44456
Santa Fe de Bogotá (Lawyers' collective)

CINEP
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and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 November 1991.