

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/069/2003

29 October 2003

UA 306/03 Fear for safety/ Death threats

COLOMBIA Yaneth Montoya Martínez (f), journalist

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Yaneth Montoya Martínez, a journalist in the city of Barrancabermeja in Santander Department, following reports that she has received death threats from army-backed paramilitaries.

On 22 October, the regional office of the *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Human Rights Ombudsman) in the central Magdalena Medio region of Colombia received a telephone call from an unidentified man who expressed concern for the safety of Yolanda Montoya Martínez. He told the Ombudsman's office that her name was on a death list issued by the army-backed paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. The AUC have reportedly accused her of being a guerrilla informant and a gossip ("*por sapos y chismosas*").

At around 5pm on 24 October, an anonymous caller telephoned the home of Yaneth Montoya Martínez, and reportedly said, "*Dígale a esa sapa que se cuide, que no de papaya porque como sea la iban a matar*" ("Tell that guerrilla informant to take care of herself and not to make a fuss because she will be killed").

Yaneth Montoya Martínez is a journalist on the regional newspaper, *Vanguardia Liberal*. The newspaper recently received a complaint that she was presenting a negative image of Barrancabermeja after writing an article about life in an area of the city.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Barrancabermeja is under siege from army-backed paramilitaries who control entire areas of the city, despite the presence of large numbers of security forces. According to the regional Human Rights Ombudsman's office, so far this year 94 people have been killed, 56 have "disappeared" and at least 600 have been displaced in the city of Barrancabermeja.

Journalists are frequently harassed, tortured and killed by armed groups in the conflict who accuse them of collaborating with their enemies. Colombia is one of the countries with highest levels of violence against journalists. At least five journalists have been killed by army-backed paramilitaries or guerrilla forces so far this year.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of journalist Yaneth Montoya Martínez, after she reportedly received death threats from army-backed paramilitaries;
- urging the authorities to take appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of Yaneth Montoya Martínez, in accordance with her wishes, so she may continue her work as a journalist;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and full investigation into the death threats against Yaneth Montoya Martínez, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern that the government has taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the Barrancabermeja area, despite UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Santander, urging that the results are made public, and that those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice.

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 1 342 0592 / 337 58 90

Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe / Dear President Uribe

Governor of Santander Department
Sr. Jorge Eliecer Gómez Villamizar
Gobernador del Departamento de Santander
Gobernación de Santander
Calle 37, No. 10-30
Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Fax: + 57 76 842843

Salutation: Dear Governor Gómez Villamizar / Sr. Gobernador Gómez Villamizar

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio
Fiscal General de la Nación
Fiscalía General de la Nación
Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite)
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 / 2017 (if someone answers say “me da tono de fax por favor”)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental Human Rights Organization
CREDHOS
AA 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 10 December 2003.