

**COLOMBIA Members of Minga (non-governmental human rights organization)**

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Members of the non-governmental human rights organization Minga have reportedly been followed and harassed by men believed to be members of a paramilitary organisation. Amnesty International believes that people working for Minga may be in danger.

Two Minga workers were apparently on their way to meet with state officials in the capital, Bogotá, when they were followed by two men on a motorcycle. They stopped to let the motorcycle pass, but it stayed behind, eventually following them into a car park, where they stopped. One of the men on the motorcycle, who was carrying a rucksack, approached the car, putting his hand inside his jacket as if reaching for a gun. The Minga workers, together with their non-Colombian volunteer from Peace Brigades International, called for help, shouting that they were human rights defenders. Security guards came from the car-park and a neighbouring building, and the two men fled.

At the end of August a message was circulated on the Internet which declared that the *Grupo de Limpieza Urbana*, Urban Cleansing Group of the army-backed paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia would be starting a "clean-up campaign" (*campaña de limpieza*) to rid Colombia of people they believe to be urban guerrillas. The security forces and their paramilitary allies have frequently named human rights workers as guerrilla collaborators, and many of the people they accuse have then been killed or "disappeared".

Minga is a national human rights organization based in Bogotá which files complaints with the authorities about human rights violations committed by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. In the past its workers have received death threats after they reported human rights violations to the national government.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Paramilitary groups have killed several thousand civilians over the past five years. The government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989, yet they continue to operate with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

The security forces and their paramilitary allies have a policy of accusing human rights organizations of supporting or collaborating with the guerillas, so they can present them as legitimate military targets. At least 25 human rights defenders have been killed or "disappeared" in the last three years.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defenders working with Minga;
- urging a full and impartial investigation into the recent paramilitary threats circulated via the Internet to a number of non-governmental organizations and the incident on 11 September during which Minga workers were followed, urging that the results are made public and those responsible brought to justice;

- urging the government to adhere to its obligations to protect human rights defenders, as set out by the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, and by the Organization of American States;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**President of Colombia

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República  
 Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia**  
**Telex: 44281 PALP CO**  
**Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/284 2186/337 1351**  
**Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Pastrana**

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gustavo Bell  
 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 1 286 4126 / 281 1213 / 222 1874**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro**

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 1 341 9583 / 334 3960**  
**Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro**

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental human rights organization  
 Minga, AA 40303, 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 30 October 2001.