

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK ACTION

Date: 20 September 2001

Duration: 30 October 2001

COLOMBIA: Human rights defender killed in Tumaco, others in danger

On 19 September at midday, Yolanda Cerón, a nun and the director of the human rights team of the catholic church organization Pastoral Social in Tumaco, Nariño department was shot several times by unidentified gunmen as she walked across a park in Tumaco. She was taken to the local hospital where she died moments later.

Yolanda Cerón had worked for many years with Pastoral Social to denounce human rights violations in Nariño department and in support of the victims and their families. She had recently reported that she had been followed by unidentified men and that the offices of Pastoral Social were under permanent surveillance. She had also recently been called to the attorney general's office in Tumaco to ratify the denunciations she had made some months previously of several cases of human rights violations.

*The human rights situation in Tumaco and other parts of the south-western Nariño department has deteriorated markedly since September 2000 when paramilitary groups, backed by the security forces began operating in the town. Many social activists received death threats at this time. On 6 August, two members of the *Movimiento Popular Multiétnico de la Vertiente del Pacífico Nariñense*, Multi-ethnic People's Movement of the Nariño Pacific Coast were killed in Tumaco. Despite a heavy military presence in the region and the arrest of a number of paramilitaries, paramilitary groups continue to carry out their campaign. The killing of Yolanda Cerón who was shot 8 times in broad daylight and in the centre of town, clearly demonstrates the ease with which gunmen are able to operate in Tumaco.*

There is serious concern for the safety of members of Pastoral Social and other human rights defenders in Tumaco.

RECOMMENDED ACTION BY HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK:

1. Please send urgent faxes to the Colombian Embassy in your country:

- *expressing your alarm at the killing of Yolanda Cerón, director of Pastoral Social in Tumaco, Nariño on 19 September;*
- *calling for an immediate, exhaustive and impartial investigation to be carried out into the killing and for those responsible to be brought to justice;*
- *calling for immediate and effective protection measures to be put in place to guarantee the safety of members of Pastoral Social and other human rights defenders in Tumaco;*
- *calling on the Colombian authorities to take urgent measures to end attacks against social activists in Nariño department, where despite a heavy military presence, paramilitary violence continues apparently unabated.*

2. Please also raise this case in any upcoming meetings with Colombian diplomatic representatives in your country or your Ministry of Foreign Relations.

3. Please use the photograph of Yolanda Cerón to publicise this case as widely as possible including on websites etc.

Please send your letters to:

The Colombian Embassy in your country.

Please send copies of your letters to:

Human rights organization

Pastoral Social

Diócesis de Tumaco

Tumaco, Nariño, Colombia

Fax: ++ 57 27 271 279

Email: diocest@col2.telecom.com.co

In case of any doubts or queries regarding this action please contact:

Human Rights Defenders Program (Americas), Amnesty International, International Secretariat

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