

EXTERNAL

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"Disappearance" / Fear for safety

10 July 1997

ECUADOR Jeremías Ramírez, Colombian national
Two unidentified men

Jeremías Ramírez, a Colombian national, and two unidentified friends have "disappeared" after being detained by men who identified themselves as members of the Ecuadorean *Policía Nacional*, National Police. Amnesty International fears for their safety.

According to reports, on the morning of 10 June 1997 Jeremías Ramírez, accompanied by his two friends, left his home in the Lucha de los Pobres district of the capital Quito. The vehicle in which they were travelling was intercepted by four men in two cars. The men were dressed in "blue uniforms", "*ternos azules*", and identified themselves as police agents.

Jeremías Ramírez and his friends were held at gunpoint, forced into the two cars, and driven off to an unknown destination. Their families visited Quito's *Centro de Detención Provisional*, CDP, Provisional Detention Centre, and *Oficina de Investigación del Delito*, OID, Criminal Investigation Office, but were not given any information as to the detainees' whereabouts.

A *habeas corpus* petition filed for Jeremías Ramírez before the municipal authorities of the *Distrito Metropolitano de Quito*, Metropolitan District of Quito, resulted in the mayor, *alcalde*, issuing a resolution ordering his immediate release. However, the *habeas corpus* remained ineffective when the police denied having detained either Jeremías Ramírez or his two friends.

In a report to Amnesty International, an Ecuadorean human rights organization comments that the denial by the police that Jeremías Ramírez and his two friends are in their custody does not generate any confidence in the security forces, since on previous occasions they have kept detainees in unacknowledged detention for over a month. In some cases the fate of these detainees has never been clarified, giving rise to fears that they may have been extrajudicially executed or died under torture while being interrogated.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Between 1984 and 1988, at least 150 persons were reported to have been "disappeared", extrajudicially executed or to have died under torture, following detention by the armed forces or the police. These human rights violations occurred mainly in the context of counter-insurgency operations against the now extinct armed opposition group *Alfaro Vive, Carajo!*, AVC, Alfaro Lives, Damn!. The vast majority of these cases were never satisfactorily resolved by the authorities.

Following the defeat of the AVC in 1988, the rate of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions in Ecuador dropped significantly. Occasional cases, unconnected to the former AVC, continued to be reported from August 1988 onwards (see Amnesty International *Annual Reports* for the years 1989 through to 1996).

However, after the AVC was defeated, hundreds of cases of torture, ill-treatment, and death in custody, and of people being shot dead by the security forces, continue to be reported by Ecuadorean human rights organizations. The majority of victims have been suspected common criminals, peasants and indigenous people involved in land disputes. Other victims include

students, workers and others involved in public protests against government economic policies.

During the first half of 1997 Amnesty International has received reports of five persons who have been "disappeared": Angel Heriberto Hinojosa in January, Marco Bienvenido Palma Mendoza in May, and Jeremías Ramírez and his two unidentified friends in June.

In February, Amnesty International wrote to General Frank Vargas Pazzos, then *Ministro de Gobierno y Policía*, Minister of Government and Police, about the case of Angel Hinojosa, but to date the organization has not received a reply. At the beginning of July Amnesty International wrote to Dr José Ayala Lasso, currently Ecuador's *Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores*, Foreign Minister, and formerly United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, about the case of Marco Bienvenido Palma. The organization took the opportunity to raise with Dr Ayala Lasso the unresolved case of Angel Hinojosa. Amnesty International requested Dr Ayala Lasso to inform Amnesty International of the steps taken by the relevant authorities to investigate both of these unresolved cases.

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

- expressing concern at the reported "disappearance" of Jeremías Ramírez and his two unidentified friends, following their detention in Quito on 10 June by four people identifying themselves as policemen;
- requesting that their whereabouts be urgently established;
- asking that they be brought before a judge, and that either they be charged with recognisable criminal offences or released;
- asking that while in detention they be humanely treated and given access to lawyers, doctors and relatives;

if possible, also:

- ask what steps the government is taking in response to Amnesty International's open letter of July 1996 to the then president-elect Abdalá Bucaram recommending the government outline and implement an effective human rights program for Ecuador.

APPEALS TO:

Please note that there are currently problems with fax lines to Ecuador. If unable to get a tone, please try later. It may be helpful to go through the international operator.

1) President of the Republic

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 Presidente de la República del Ecuador
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Telegrams: Presidente, Quito, Ecuador

Salutation: Señor Presidente/Dear President

2) Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía

Sr. César Verduga Vélez
 Ministro de Gobierno y Policía
 Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía

Espejo y Benalcázar

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Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

CEDHU

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Quito, ECUADOR

and to diplomatic representatives of ECUADOR accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 August 1997.