

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 53/009/2004

17 May 2004

Further information on UA 124/02 (AMR 53/004/2002, 23 April 2002), and follow-up (AMR 53/008/2003, 15 May 2003) - Fear for safety / Death threats

VENEZUELA Liliana Ortega (f) - President of *Comité de Familiares de Víctimas del 27 de Febrero (COFAVIC)*, Committee of the Relatives of the Victims of 27 February
Other members of COFAVIC

A death threat and incidents of intimidation have once again raised fears for the lives of Liliana Ortega and other members of the Venezuelan human rights organization COFAVIC (*Comité de Familiares de Víctimas del 27 de Febrero*, Committee of the Relatives of the Victims of 27 February).

In the early afternoon of Wednesday 12 May an unidentified individual was seen by a COFAVIC member placing leaflets at the main entrance of the organization's headquarters. The leaflets made death threats against Liliana Ortega, and contained insulting language. They featured a caricature of Liliana Ortega saying "they pay me to defend the human rights of the scoundrels from the opposition" ("*a mí me pagan para que defienda los derechos humanos de los malandros de la oposición*").

That same day, COFAVIC also received a number of telephone calls from unidentified individuals who asked for information regarding Liliana Ortega and COFAVIC, and then hung up abruptly.

The threats are believed to be linked with COFAVIC's work in documenting and denouncing cases of torture and ill-treatment by members of the police and security forces. The organization was referred to in an Amnesty International report, also launched on 12 May, on the political violence which occurred throughout Venezuela in February/March 2004.

Police guards were reinstated on the doors of the COFAVIC offices following the death threats. However, Amnesty International fears that without a clear signal from the Venezuelan government that threats and violence against human rights organizations such as COFAVIC will not be tolerated, the lives of these human rights defenders will remain in danger.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Between 27 February and 4 March 2004, opposition demonstrators clashed with police and security forces. As many as 14 people were killed and more than 200 were injured, with over 500 detained (see AI report, *Venezuela: Human rights under threat* (AMR 53/005/2004, May 2004).

Along with other national and international human rights organizations, COFAVIC have publicly called for independent and impartial investigations to be carried out into human rights violations committed in the context of these disturbances in order to clarify all levels of responsibility for the violence and bring to justice those responsible.

The detention in May 2004 of up to 100 alleged Colombian paramilitaries who were reportedly involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the elected government of President Chávez has raised political tensions in the country once again. The authorities are investigating those allegedly involved.

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

- expressing concern at the threats against Liliana Ortega and other members of COFAVIC;

- calling on the authorities to take steps, in accordance with the wishes of those at risk, to effectively guarantee their safety;
- calling for a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation of the threats against Liliana Ortega and COFAVIC, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that the UN *Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties* recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Hugo Chávez Frías
Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Palacio de Miraflores
Esquina de Bolero
Av. Urdaneta
Caracas, Venezuela

Fax: + 58 212 806 3376

Salutation: Señor Presidente/ Dear President

Attorney General

Dr. Isaías Rodríguez
Fiscal General de la República,
Avenida Universidad
Esquina Pele el ojo a Misericordia
Frente a Parque Carabobo
Caracas, Venezuela

Fax: + 58 212 576 4419

Salutation: Estimado Dr Rodríguez/ Dear Dr Rodríguez

Minister of the Interior and Justice

General Lucas Rincón Romero
Ministro del Interior y Justicia
Ministerio del Interior y Justicia
Avenida Urdaneta Esquina de Platanal
Edificio Interior y Justicia
Despacho del Ministro, piso tres
Caracas, Venezuela

Fax: + 58 212 506 1194 or 58 212 506 1507

(if someone answers say :“tono de fax, por favor”)

Salutation: Señor Ministro/ Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

COFAVIC,
Apdo Postal 16150
La Candelaria
Caracas 1010-A
Venezuela

and to diplomatic representatives of Venezuela accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 June 2004.