

URGENT ACTION

STOP THREATS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Activists in several NGOs based in south-western Colombia, have recently received death threats. They and other staff working for these organizations are in grave danger.

On 31 May, a death threat was texted to the mobile phones of several leaders of the Afro-descendant community of La Toma, and the Indigenous reservation (*Resguardo*) of Cerro Tijeras, Suárez Municipality, in Cauca department, southwestern Colombia. The threat, signed by the paramilitary group Black Eagles (*Águilas Negras*), named several human rights organizations and individuals including the Community Council of La Toma, Black Communities Process (*Proceso de Comunidades Negras*, PCN), the Social Research and Action Association (*Asociación de Investigación y la Acción Social*, NOMADESC), and the Trade Union Congress (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT). All these organizations have opposed the development of gold mines or large-scale hydroelectric projects in the area, which inhabitants consider would undermine their livelihoods. Most of those threatened had previously received a death threat by text message on 5 May, purporting to be from a paramilitary group calling itself Black Eagles New Generation, (*Águilas Negras Nueva Generación*).

Days earlier, another death threat had been levelled against NOMADESC and other national non-governmental human rights organizations working with these communities and organizations in the region. On 27 May, an anonymous caller rang a police station in the neighbouring department of Valle del Cauca. The caller told the police officer who answered the call that he was a soldier, saying: "I am ringing to warn that there is an order to kill Luz Marina and John Freddy of ECATE, Berenice Leyta (Berenice Celeyta) of NOMADESC, and the members of the CSPP and that they have until Monday [31 May] to leave the region". (*"Llamo alertar que hasta el día lunes tienen plazo de salir de la región, hay orden de matar a Luz Marina y John Freddy de ECATE, Berenice Leyta (sic) de NOMADESC, y a los del Comité de Solidaridad de Presos Políticos"*.)

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into the death threats against members of the Community Council of La Toma, the Indigenous reservation of Cerro Tijeras, PCN, NOMADESC, CUT, ECATE, and CSPP; to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Demanding that they provide protection for those threatened, as agreed with those in danger;
- Reminding the authorities to fulfil their obligations regarding the situation of human rights defenders, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
- Urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 JULY 2010 TO:

President

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez
Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 337 5890

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

Acting Attorney General

Dr. Guillermo Mendoza Diago
Fiscal General de la Nación (e)
Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán
No. 52-01) Bloque C
Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: +57 1 570 2000 (dial extension
2017 on hearing the welcome message)**
**Salutation: Dear Attorney
General/Estimado Sr. Fiscal General**

And copies to:

NOMADESC
Carrera 4 No. 4-43 ofi. 201
Cali, Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

STOP THREATS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Numerous human rights defenders have been threatened and killed over recent years in the departments of Valle del Cauca and Cauca. Most recently Alexander Quintero, president of the Association of the Community Action Councils of the Alto Naya region, *Asociación de Juntas de Acción Comunal del Alto Naya* was killed on 23 May 2010 in Cauca. NOMADESC issued a statement condemning this killing. Alexander Quintero, had been campaigning in favour of truth, justice and reparation for the victims of mass killings in the area in 2001 carried out by paramilitaries operating with the support of the armed forces. He had received repeated death threats as a consequence of his human rights work. The paramilitary death threat issued on 31 May 2010 referred to the fact that the paramilitaries had located Alexander Quintero and had decided to respect the life of his family.

The 5 May 2010 death threat sent via text message to the telephones of several human rights activists working on Valle del Cauca and Cauca Departments coincided with the opposition of these activists to the development of large-scale economic projects including gold-mining interests. Community activists representing the Afro-descendant inhabitants of one affected community, La Toma, have complained that the authorities have issued mining rights to companies to exploit minerals on the lands they claim without the prior consent of the population. The death threats received by communities followed an official order to evict the inhabitants of La Toma on 21 May. Action to remove the inhabitants has now been postponed until 15 June 2010.

Following a paramilitary death threat issued on 22 October 2009 against NOMADESC, PCN, CUT, the Afro-descendant community of La Toma, Indigenous reservation of Cerro Tijeras (See UA 293/09, AMR 23/025/2009, 3 November 2009), three members of the Indigenous reservation of Cerro Tijeras were killed between 29 October and 13 November 2009.

During Colombia's 40-year internal armed conflict, the security forces and paramilitary groups have frequently labelled human rights organizations and trade unions as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, and have gone on to threaten, abduct or kill them. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders and trade unionists they consider to be siding with their enemies.

UA: 126/10 Index: AMR 23/021/2010 Issue Date: 02 June 2010

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

