

# Colombia

STOP  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN



## Justice for Teresa!

### HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: KILLINGS AND THREATS CONTINUE

María del Socorro Mosquera, Mery del Socorro Naranjo and Teresa Yarce, members and associates of the *Asociación de Mujeres de las Independencias*, (AMI), the Women's Association of Las Independencias, based in the city of Medellín, were first detained by the security forces on 12 November 2002 and held without charge for nine days. They had previously denounced cases of human rights violations in the *Comuna XIII* district of the city during *Operación Orión*<sup>1</sup>, including killings carried out by paramilitaries in areas under army control. Although they were released on 21 November 2002, criminal investigations against them for alleged guerrilla-related activities reportedly continued.

In the same month, Luz Dary Ospina, president of AMI, was forced to leave her home in the Las Independencias neighbourhood of Comuna XIII in Medellín as a result of paramilitary death threats. Her husband and children remained in the house, but in subsequent months were subjected to repeated raids, threats and other forms of intimidation by the security forces and unidentified gunmen. Luz Dary had repeatedly denounced violations of human rights since *Operación Mariscal*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Operación Orión* was a large-scale security force operation launched against guerrilla-linked militia primarily in the Comuna XIII in September 2002. The Operation facilitated the consolidation of paramilitary control of the area.

<sup>2</sup> *Operación Mariscal* was a large-scale security force operation launched against guerrilla-linked militia in the Comuna XIII in May 2002. See AI Report: *Colombia: Paramilitaries in Medellín:*

Teresa Yarce was shot dead on 6 October 2004 in a street near her home in Las Independencias by a gunman recognized by witnesses as a paramilitary. At the time, Teresa Yarce was with one of her daughters, and her colleague Mery del Socorro Naranjo.



Teresa Yarce, killed by a paramilitary in October 2004 ©Private

Teresa Yarce had condemned the fact that public funds earmarked for public services were allegedly being siphoned off to pay two paramilitaries who were appearing on the payroll as public services workers. A few weeks before she was killed she had reportedly

escaped a paramilitary attempt to abduct and kill her. Teresa Yarce was killed hours before she was due to testify to judicial authorities against a local paramilitary leader who had been detained.

About three hours after Teresa Yarce was shot, a known member of a paramilitary group operating in *Comuna XIII* reportedly approached Mery del Socorro Naranjo when she was in her family's home in Las Independencias and told her that the paramilitaries were celebrating Teresa's death and saying that they were now "going to kill the other two" ("*después van las otras dos*"), believed to refer to Mery del Socorro Naranjo and María del Socorro Mosquera.

## BACKGROUND

Despite attempts to camouflage politically-related killings as common crimes, many threats and killings of civilians are intended to send a clear message to the community not to challenge paramilitary control. Killings of individuals accused of being guerrilla collaborators often bear a political message.

Human rights defenders, who threaten to expose the reality of the human rights crisis in the city and the links which exist between the paramilitaries and the security forces, are at particular risk since they continue to pose a serious challenge to the ability of paramilitaries to consolidate their control unhindered. Amnesty International believes that Teresa Yarce was killed because she dared to challenge the presence of paramilitary forces in her neighbourhood.

## DEFENDING WOMEN DEFENDING RIGHTS

Women are at the forefront of the global movement of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) who are active across the world for the promotion, protection and defence of human rights.

Women as HRDs include activists, victims and survivors of human rights abuses, professionals, and women working on behalf of their communities, family members, partners and activist colleagues. They have founded the human rights movement in many parts of the world.

Women HRDs assert the rights of, among others, women and girls, indigenous peoples, ethnic and religious minorities, trade unionists and lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people. They have documented and exposed violations of civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights and often highlight the gender-specific manifestations, causes and consequences of such violations. They are protesting against widespread impunity for all forms of violence against women and promoting women's right

to live free of gender-based violence. They are supporting countless victims of human rights violations and their relatives in demanding justice; in particular, they have led projects dedicated to supporting victims of gender discrimination, sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women.

Women human rights defenders face marginalization, prejudice, violence and threats to their human rights, safety and well-being on multiple levels: as human rights defenders; as women and as individuals who challenge societal gender stereotypes and the status of women; and as activists raising controversial issues such as sexuality, sexual orientation and reproductive rights. The perpetrators punishing them for their human rights work may be the state, but it may also be political groups, the community and/or their partner or relatives without the state giving effective protection.

Governments and social movements often do not prioritize the rights that women HRDs fight for and this impacts on the credibility and legitimacy of their struggle, increasing their isolation and the risk of public and community repudiation, stigmatisation, discrimination arbitrary arrest and detention. WHRDs have been deliberately killed, abducted, and made to disappear as a consequence of their work. They face gender-specific repercussions, such as sexual harassment, rape and assault to their integrity as human beings.

Many women human rights defenders have to flee their country in order to find effective protection of their rights.

## INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

The **UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders**, adopted by consensus of the UN General Assembly in 1998, affirms the right to defend human rights and urges states to protect human rights work and those who carry it out. To bolster implementation of the Declaration, the office of the Special Representative to the UN Secretary General on human rights defenders was created in April 2000.

The Special Representative, Hina Jilani has highlighted the issue of women human rights defenders. Her 2002 report to the UN Commission on Human Rights stated that "while women defenders work as indefatigably as their male counterparts in upholding human rights and the rights of victims of human rights violations, there exist some characteristics that are specific to them as women involved in the defence of human rights" and that "they face risks that are specific to their gender and additional to those faced by men".

**Article 12 of UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders provides that:**

1. Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration. 3. In this connection, everyone is entitled, individually and in association with others, to be protected effectively under national law in reacting against or opposing, through peaceful means, activities and acts, including those by omission, attributable to States that result in violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as acts of violence perpetrated by groups or individuals that affect the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In addition, **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325** commits States to end the impunity which contributes to on-going violence against women.

**TAKE ACTION**

**Please write to the Colombian Government**

- Calling for full and impartial investigations into the killing of Teresa Yarce and the threats against AMI members, including María del Socorro Mosquera, Mery del Socorro Naranjo, and other members and associates of AMI, so that they can continue their human rights work.
- Raising concerns at the ongoing campaign to undermine and discredit the legitimate work of human rights defenders, trade unionists and other social activists.
- Raising concerns for the safety of human rights defenders in Medellín and across Colombia.
- Calling on the authorities to elaborate plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders in Medellín, on implementing the principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and to keep you informed of these plans.

Please send your appeals to:

President of the Republic of Colombia  
 Presidente de la República de Colombia  
 Dr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez  
 Palacio de Nariño  
 Carrera 8 No.7-26  
 Bogotá,  
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 Fax: +57 1 342 0592  
 Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia  
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 Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón  
 Vicepresidencia  
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 Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Vice-Presidente

Minister of the Interior and Justice  
 Ministro del Interior y Justicia  
 Dr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega  
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 Salutation: Sr. Ministro

Minister of Foreign Affairs  
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