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Colombia: Concern over arrest of pregnant human rights defender

Amnesty International today expressed concern at the arrest of a heavily pregnant human rights defender in the north-eastern city of Bucaramanga on 16 November, on charges of having links with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Carolina Rubio, who is more than eight months pregnant, is a member of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE) and of the Committee of Solidarity for Political Prisoners (FCSP), and is being held in prison despite concerns over her health.

“The Colombian authorities have a duty to investigate any criminal activity and bring to justice those responsible through processes which conform to international standards of fairness” said Marcelo Pollack, Colombia Researcher for Amnesty International

“However, there is a great deal of concern that such arrests are part of a strategy designed to silence and discredit the work of human rights defenders and to distract attention from their exposure of human rights violations”.

Her arrest also comes at a time of growing concern about threats against and killings of human rights defenders and other social activists, carried out mainly by paramilitary groups.

The evidence against Carolina Rubio appears to be based on information from anonymous informants.

Criminal proceedings against human rights defenders in Colombia have often been based on spurious evidence from often paid informants, rather than on evidence gathered in the course of impartial criminal investigations by the civilian investigative authorities.

Carolina Rubio last month returned from Brussels where she represented Colombian human rights and social organizations in a meeting of European human rights organizations and development agencies. During her visit, she met with European Commission representatives and members of the diplomatic community, to whom she presented a report on human rights in the first 75 days of the government of President Juan Manuel Santos.

“The authorities must ensure that due process is respected and that Carolina Rubio’s legal situation is resolved speedily. They must also ensure that she has access to quality health care while in detention. Amnesty International is closely monitoring this case, especially because concerns have been raised about irregularities in the process” said Marcelo Pollack,

Amnesty International is also monitoring the safety of human rights defenders in Bucaramanga, given that

threats against and killings of such activists, either by paramilitaries or members of the security forces, have often followed attempts to advance criminal proceedings against them, particularly when these flawed processes fail.