

PUBLIC

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UA 19/99 Fear for safety / extrajudicial execution

1 February 1999

COLOMBIA Human rights defenders in Colombia, particularly those working in Medellín, Antioquia Department.

Everardo de Jesús Puertas, human rights defender] killed
Julio Ernesto González, human rights defender]

Amnesty International is concerned that paramilitary organizations are stepping up attacks against human rights defenders while world attention is focussed on the humanitarian disaster caused by the recent earthquake in Colombia, in order to avoid the full condemnation of the international community.

This follows the killing, apparently by paramilitaries, of human rights defenders Everardo de Jesús Puertas and Julio Ernesto González on 30 January 1999 and the abduction and "disappearance" of four other human rights workers on 28 January 1999 (see UA 12/99, AMR 23/04/99, 29 January 1999).

Everardo de Jesús Puertas and Julio Ernesto González worked for the *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos* (CSPP), Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners. They were travelling from Medellín to Bogotá when their bus was stopped in Doradal, Antioquia Department, by two heavily armed men and a woman, who picked out the two men and shot them dead.

The CSPP is an internationally respected non-governmental human rights organization which works for the legal defence of political prisoners and the promotion and protection of civil and political rights. CSPP workers have previously suffered serious human rights violations by paramilitary groups.

The Colombian Government has denounced the killings and offered a reward for information on the identity of the killers. Amnesty International welcomes these steps, but believes immediate measures must be taken to protect human rights defenders and to dismantle paramilitary groups known to be operating in Antioquia Department.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights organizations, particularly those seeking to uphold the legal rights of people accused of "subversion", are frequently labelled guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. These organizations are thus presented as legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war. This policy has led the security forces and their paramilitary allies to commit an increasing number of serious human rights violations against human rights defenders. Over 20 human rights defenders have been killed or "disappeared" in Colombia in the last two years.

In 1997 Mario Calderón and Elsa Alvarado of the *Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular* (CINEP), Centre for Research and Popular Education, were shot dead in their home (see UA 146/97, AMR 23/31/97, 20 May 1997 and follow ups). Carlos Castaño, a national paramilitary leader implicated in the crime remains at large despite outstanding warrants for his arrest.

In 1998 the security forces made an illegal raid on the offices of the *Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz* (CIJP), Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace, after military intelligence issued a report alleging the CIJP had information relating to an urban guerrilla network (See UA 151/98, AMR 23/31/98, 15 May 1998).

Also in 1998, two prominent human rights workers were murdered. Jesús María Valle Jaramillo was shot dead in his office in Medellín after denouncing links between military and paramilitary organizations (UA 62/98, AMR 23/12/98, 2 March 1998) and Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, a renowned human rights lawyer, was killed in Bogotá, reportedly in retaliation for defending trade union leaders facing charges of supporting the armed opposition (UA 122/98, AMR 23/22/98, 20 April 1998).

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

- condemning the killing of Everardo de Jesús Puertas and Julio Ernesto González of the CSPP on 30 January 1999 and expressing concern for the safety of human rights defenders in Colombia, particularly those working in Antioquia Department;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate and effective steps, as deemed appropriate by those at risk, to protect members of the CSPP and other human rights defenders in Antioquia Department and throughout Colombia;
- calling for a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the killing of Everardo de Jesús Puertas and Julio Ernesto González, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the Colombian Government to act on its commitments to dismantle paramilitary organizations and to bring to justice all members of the security forces found to have links with such organizations;

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andres Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes: 44281 PALP CO
Faxes: + 57 1 284 2186/289 3377/286 7434/
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO
Faxes: + 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405 / 286 0053 / 341 9739
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Rodrigo Lloreda, Ministro de Defensa Nacional,
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO
Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Governor of the Department of Antioquia

Dr. Alberto Builes Ortega, Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia
Gobernación de Antioquia, Calle 42B, # 52-106, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia
Telegrams: Gobernador de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia
Faxes: + 574 381 1342
Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO: Human Rights Organization

Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos (CSPP)

Apartado Aéreo 22803, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 March 1999.