

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/013/2004

03 March 2004

UA 91/04

Fear for safety

COLOMBIA

Rodolfo Ríos Lozano (m), human rights lawyer
Members of the *Asociación Campesina de Arauca (ACA)*, Arauca Peasant

Association

Human rights lawyer Rodolfo Ríos Lozano has reportedly received death threats accusing him of links with left-wing guerrillas. Other human rights lawyers threatened in this way by the armed forces or their paramilitary allies have been killed, and Amnesty International is seriously concerned for his safety.

A recent telephone death threat accused him of being a "FARC terrorist dog, lawyer who defends narcoterrorists" (*Perro terrorista de las FARC, abogado defensor de narcoterroristas*). The FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) is a guerrilla organisation that has been fighting the Colombian government since the 1960s. During a separate telephone call he was told that he had to choose ("*usted debe escoger*") between leaving the country, dropping the cases he was working on, or being killed. Over the last few days the death threats have become more frequent. The callers have not identified themselves. He has also reportedly been kept under surveillance and followed by unidentified men who have been loitering around his home and his office.

The threats follow the release of several people he was defending, and who had reportedly been detained in a number of mass arrests around the country during military-coordinated operations with the Office of the Attorney General. Over the past year Amnesty International has documented a number of mass arrests of people accused of "subversive" activities, including human rights defenders, peasant leaders and trade unionists. Frequently the arrests are made on the basis of spurious allegations by the armed forces and paid or military informers. Many of those arrested in these operations have later been released.

Rodolfo Ríos is representing Luz Perly Córdoba, president of the *Asociación Campesina de Arauca (ACA)*, Arauca Peasant Association. Luz Perly was detained in Bogotá on 18 February and has been accused of being linked to guerrilla activities. She was apparently detained on the basis of evidence from informers, not serious and impartial judicial investigations.

ACA treasurer Jesús Gutiérrez was detained in Arauca the same day. (For more information on these detentions please see Amnesty International News Service 043, AMR 23/11/2004)

Over the last year members of the ACA in Arauca department have reportedly been threatened, harassed and beaten by members of the armed forces who have repeatedly accused the ACA of being a "subversive" organization. The ACA has played a role in exposing the human rights crisis in Arauca Department including human rights violations in which the armed forces are implicated. Criticising the armed forces in this way puts them in grave danger.

On 21 February troops of the Army's Mobile Brigade Number 5 reportedly entered the area of Botalón in the municipality of Tame, Arauca Department, where ACA leaders Marina Navarro and Daniel Botello live. The soldiers apparently had orders to detain Navarro and Botello, but according to witnesses, soldiers operating near Botalón said that the two leaders would not be captured but would be killed ("*dar de baja*"). Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of these two activists. The following day, soldiers from the same mobile Brigade reportedly entered the nearby hamlet of Betoyes wearing paramilitary uniforms, and threatened the inhabitants.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Rodolfo Ríos Lozano, a human rights lawyer representing political prisoners.
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the threats against him, for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of members of the *Asociación Campesina de Arauca* in Arauca department, whom the security forces have reportedly threatened to kill;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all measures deemed appropriate by the organization are taken to guarantee the safety of its members;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Arauca, and urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with United Nations recommendations

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

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

Fax: + 57 1 342 0592 / 337 5890

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

Head of the Armed Forces

General Carlos Alberto Ospina Ovalle
Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52 (CAN)
Edificio Comando General 4o piso
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 266 02 98

Salutation: Dear General/ Sr. General

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
Fiscal General de la Nación
Fiscalía General de la Nación
Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite)
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 / 2000 (you will hear a message in Spanish asking you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:

Non- governmental human rights organization

REINICIAR
Calle 19 #3-10
Edificio Barichara Torre B
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 13 April 2004.