

EXTERNAL

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Torture / Fear for Safety

8 March 1996

COLOMBIA Jaime HERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ, oil worker
Orlando HERNÁNDEZ, his brother

There are serious concerns for the safety of Orlando Hernández and his brother Jaime Hernández Díaz, who live in Barrancabermeja, department of Santander.

On 1 March 1996, members of a paramilitary group reportedly tortured Orlando Hernández and stated that they were searching for Jaime Hernández whom they accused of being a guerrilla collaborator.

At about 7.15pm, 11 armed and hooded men, reportedly travelling in a lorry with the markings of the Postobón company, arrived at the shop owned by Jaime Hernández Díaz. They entered the shop, forced several people to leave the premises, and then tortured and threatened Orlando Hernández. The men identified themselves as being *masetos*, members of a paramilitary group called *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS), Death to Kidnappers. The armed men stated that they were going to kill Jaime Hernández Díaz for being a guerrilla collaborator.

The men stated that they would return, and later that night the paramilitary group was seen patrolling in several different parts of Barrancabermeja.

Jaime Hernández is an oil industry worker and there is serious concern for his safety given that in recent months oil workers in Barrancabermeja have been the victim of repeated death threats made by paramilitary groups operating in the region. Concern for the brothers' safety has also been heightened by the fact that between 1 and 3 March MAS paramilitary graffiti has been appearing in different parts of Barrancabermeja. Amongst the slogans that have appeared on walls are: "*Muerte a sapos y guerrilleros Viva el MAS*", "*Death to informers and guerrillas Long Live MAS*", and "*fuera de B/ca EPL y ELN 'Asesinos' HP*", "*Get out of Barrancabermeja EPL and ELN assassins Sons-of-Bitches*". (The EPL is the acronym for the *Ejército Popular de Liberación*, Popular Liberation Army guerrilla group and ELN refers to the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, National Liberation Army guerrilla group).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years widespread and systematic human rights violations have occurred in Colombia, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearance", torture and arbitrary arrest. In Barrancabermeja workers and trade unionists of the oil industry have frequently been the target of human rights violations by both the regular armed and security forces and their paramilitary allies.

President Ernesto Samper Pizano, who assumed office on 7 August 1994, publicly stated that tackling the human rights situation would be a priority for his government and promised to dismantle paramilitary organizations. However, members of the Colombian armed and security forces, together with their paramilitary allies, continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Only exceptionally are perpetrators brought to justice; the vast majority of members of the armed and security forces responsible for gross human rights violations remain in active service. Armed opposition groups active in Colombia have also been responsible for serious abuses including kidnapping, holding hostages and arbitrary and deliberate killings.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Jaime Hernández Díaz and his brother Orlando Hernández after a paramilitary group reportedly tortured Orlando Hernández on 1 March 1996 in Barrancabermeja, department of Santander, and threatened to kill Jaime Hernández;
- calling for a full and impartial investigations into the reported torture and threats, that the results be made public and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- urging that immediate action be undertaken to dismantle the paramilitary group *Muerte a Secuestradores*, in line with governmental commitments to disband such groups. If possible, acknowledge that armed opposition groups are responsible for committing serious abuses, but stressing that this can never justify human rights violations by state officials or civilians working with them.

APPEALS TO:President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 carrera 8 No. 7-26
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 289 3377/286 7434

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe
 Ministro del Interior
 Ministerio del Interior
 Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
 Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior Serpa, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Faxes:+ 57 1 286 00 53/ 286 04 85

Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Calle 35 No. 4-31
 Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 245 5292 or 287 0939 or 288 2828

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso

Mayor of Barrancabermeja

Señor Mario Evan Neme
 Alcalde Municipal, Alcaldía Municipal
 Carrera 5, No. 8-43
 Barrancabermeja, Sector Comercial
 Santander, Colombia

Telegrams: Alcalde Municipal Evan Neme, Alcaldía Municipal, Barrancabermeja, Colombia

Salutation: Sr. Alcalde / Dear Mr Mayor

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organization

CREDHOS, AA 505, Barrancabermeja, Santander, 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 30 April 1996.