

# URGENT ACTION

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS THREATENED

**Paramilitaries have threatened to kill human rights defenders Hernando Mejía López and David Espinoza in the northern Colombian city of Barrancabermeja.**

An envelope was pushed under the door of the office of the NGO Pax Christi Barrancabermeja, which is part of the coalition Space of Human Rights Workers in Barrancabermeja (*Espacio de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de Derechos Humanos*, ETTDH), on 24 July. It contained two bullets and a death threat addressed to **Hernando Mejía López** and **David Espinoza** written on a piece of paper with the logo of the paramilitary group Los Rastrojos Urban Commandos (*Los Rastrojos Comandos Urbanos*). The death threat read "...if you do not leave in two days the lead that comes in the envelope will soon be in the chest of you two" (...*si no se van en dos días [sic] o el plomo que viene en el sobre lo tendran [sic] muy pronto en el pecho ustedes dos*).

Hernando Mejía López and David Espinoza are working on human rights education and undertaking grassroots pastoral work in poor neighbourhoods of Barrancabermeja, especially with young people. They instruct them about the political, economic and social background in which human rights violations take place in Colombia and raise awareness of the human rights situation in the country.

A member of Pax Christi Barrancabermeja had been phoned on 29 June by a man who said he was calling from the local Chamber of Commerce but later said he was part of the paramilitary group Los Urabeños. He invited him to a meeting with community leaders where paramilitaries would undertake "social cleansing" (*limpieza social*).

### **Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:**

- Expressing concern that Hernando Mejía López, David Espinoza and other members of Pax Christi Barrancabermeja were threatened by paramilitaries on 24 July, and calling on the authorities to provide them with effective protection, in line with their wishes;
- Demanding that the authorities order full and impartial investigations into the threats and publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 SEPTEMBER 2013 TO:**

#### President

Presidente Juan Manuel Santos  
Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26  
Bogotá, Colombia  
Fax: +57 1 596 0631

**Salutation: Dear President Santos/  
Excmo Sr. Presidente Santos**

#### Attorney General

Eduardo Montealegre  
Fiscalía General de la Nación  
Diagonal 22B No. 52-01 (Ciudad Salitre)  
Bloque C Piso 4  
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax +57 1 570 2000 (when recorded  
voice answers, dial ext 2023)

**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/  
Estimado Sr. Fiscal General**

#### **And copies to:**

#### NGO

Pax Christi Barrancabermeja  
Calle 62 No. 36-03  
Barrio La Esperanza  
Barrancabermeja  
Colombia

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During Colombia's long-running armed conflict between the security forces – acting alone or in collusion with paramilitaries – and a range of guerrilla groups, civilians have been the main victims. Members of trade unions, human rights organizations and other social organizations have often been labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and paramilitaries. As a result they are often killed, threatened or subjected to enforced disappearance.

Colombia's paramilitary groups supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003, but it is clear from the threats against human rights organizations and trade unions, in Barrancabermeja and elsewhere, that they are still operating. Paramilitary groups, often labelled "criminal gangs", are responsible for serious human rights violations, including killings, enforced disappearances and "social cleansing" operations in poor urban neighbourhoods.

Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders they consider to be siding with the enemy.

The NGO Pax Christi, an international peace movement, is part of the coalition Space of Human Rights Workers in Barrancabermeja (*Espacio de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de Derechos Humanos*, ETTDH), a coalition of different sectors of civil society including human rights organizations, trade unions and LGBTI activists in Barrancabermeja.

In recent weeks there have been several death threats against the human rights movement in Barrancabermeja. Please see UA 190/13, AMR 23/032/2013 (<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/032/2013/en>) and UA 178/13, AMR 23/030/2013 (<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/030/2013/en>).

Name: Hernando Mejía López, David Espinoza

Gender m/f: m

UA: 203/13 Index: AMR 23/034/2013 Issue Date: 1 August 2013