

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK ACTION**

**Date:** 11 April 2001

**Duration:** 30 April 2001

### **COLOMBIA: Solidarity action against persecution of human rights defenders and trade unionists**

*On 18 April 2001, several Colombian human rights organizations and trade unions will be closing their offices and participating in a day of action against the continuing persecution of trade unionists and human rights activists.*

*This day of action coincides with the third anniversary of the killing of human rights lawyer Eduardo Umaña Mendoza believed to be in retaliation for his defence of trade union leaders accused under anti-terrorism legislation. On the afternoon of 18 April 1998 two men and a woman who identified themselves as journalists entered Eduardo Umaña's apartment in Bogotá. They killed him with several gunshots to the head.*

Dr. Umaña was a leading human rights activist for over 20 years and helped to found a number of Colombia's national non-governmental human rights organizations. As a human rights lawyer, he represented numerous political prisoners, including many trade unionists, and sought justice in many high-profile cases. He vigorously condemned the responsibility of the security forces in human rights violations and the high level of impunity which benefits those responsible for human rights violations. He denounced the Military Justice System as a mechanism of impunity.

*Prior to his death Dr. Umaña had been threatened on numerous occasions. Complaints had been filed with the competent authorities, but no progress had been made on the investigations into these threats.*

A number of arrests have been made in connection with the murder of Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, but so far only one person has been formally charged. There is grave concern that, despite indications of military involvement in the crime, it appears that this line of investigation has not been followed.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION BY HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK:**

**Please send faxes on 16, 17 and 18 April to the Colombian government:**

*- Express your solidarity with the Colombian non-governmental organizations and trade unions which are closing their offices on 18 April in protest at the continuing persecution of Colombian human rights defenders and trade unionists;*

- Express concern that three years on from the killing of human rights lawyer, Dr. Eduardo Umaña on 18 April 1998 all those responsible for his death have not yet been brought to justice;
- Express concern that many other human rights lawyers continue to be threatened and harassed and many have been forced into exile in fear of their lives because of their work to uphold the rule of law by combatting impunity and to promote and protect human rights in Colombia in accordance with international human rights treaties and standards;
- State your awareness of the Colombian government's protection program for human rights defenders but express concern that a number of killings might have been averted if the authorities had acted appropriately by investigating death threats, by providing adequate protection when requested and by investigating the killing of other human rights defenders who died in similar circumstances;
- State that individual protection measures such as bodyguards and bullet proof jackets are not sufficient to deter the perpetrators of human rights violations against members of human rights organizations, and stressing that genuine efforts to protect human rights defenders must prioritize investigations into killings, as well as threats and harassment, as part of a comprehensive program to prevent more attacks against them;
- Urge the Colombian government to adhere to its obligations regarding human rights defenders as laid out in the UN *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* adopted on 9 December 1998.

*Please send your letters to:*

**President of the Republic of Colombia**

Presidente de la República de Colombia

Andrés Pastrana Arango

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: +57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351

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

**Vice-President of the Republic**

Vicepresidente de la República

Gustavo Bell Lemus

Vicepresidencia

Alto Consejero para Derechos Humanos

Carrera 8A No 5-57

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: +57 1 286 3589

**Salutation: Dear Vice-president/Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente**

**Minister of the Interior**

Ministro del Interior

Armando Estrada Villa

Ministerio del Interior

Palacio Echeverry

Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: +57 1 341 9583

**Salutation: Dear Minister/Sr. Ministro**

**Attorney General**

Fiscal General de la Nación

Alfonso Gómez Méndez  
Fiscalía General de la Nación  
Apartado Aéreo 29855  
Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite)  
Bogotá, COLOMBIA  
Fax: +57 1 570 2000

**Salutation: Dear Sir/Estimado Dr.**

*Please send copies of your letters to:*

**National newspaper**

*El Tiempo*

*Avenida El Dorado n°59-70*

*(Apdo Aéreo 3633)*

*Bogotá, Colombia*

*Fax: +57-1- 410 50 88 / 260 2323*

*eltiempo@eltiempo.com.co*

**Human rights organization**

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*In case of any doubts or queries regarding this action please contact:*

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***Amnesty International, International Secretariat***

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