

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Possible "disappearance" / Fear for safety

11 May 1994

**COLOMBIA**Rafael BENITEZ ORREGO, aged 23, salesman and political activist  
Nelson BENITEZ ORREGO, aged 20, driver and political activist

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Rafael and Nelson Benítez Orrego have not been seen since they were violently abducted by armed men on 5 May 1994 in the town of Dabeiba, in the Urabá region of Antioquia department.

According to sources, a group of armed men who identified themselves as members of a paramilitary group known as "The Professionals", "*Los Profesionales*", forced the two men into a vehicle and drove them to an unknown destination. Their whereabouts are still not known and there is serious concern for their safety.

Rafael Benítez and his brother Nelson Benítez are both active members of the Colombian Communist Party, *Partido Comunista Colombiano (PCC)*. Although political parties and independent organizations are free to operate in Colombia, members of all political parties have been victims of human rights violations including illegal detention, torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution because of their political views and activism.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Urabá region of Antioquia department is located in the north-west of Colombia. For many years guerrilla groups have been active in the region and, as a result, there is a high presence there of both military and army-backed paramilitary groups. Many paramilitary groups have their origins in the civilian "self-defence" squads which the army created in the 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombia armed forces to combat and disband such groups, paramilitary forces have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents with impunity in many areas of the country and continue to work with the support of the security forces. Although illegal paramilitary activity is principally centred on rural areas of guerrilla influence, "hit squads" - small groups of gunmen - have frequently been despatched to the cities to assassinate left-wing political activists, trade union leaders, human rights activists and national political leaders.

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

- expressing concern at the violent abduction and possible "disappearance" of brothers Rafael and Nelson Benítez Orrego on 5 May 1994 and urging that there be an immediate inquiry into their whereabouts;
- urging that if they are in detention, that they be humanely treated and allowed access to lawyers and to their relatives;
- urging that if in detention, that they be charged with a recognizable criminal offence or immediately released;
- urging that the government should immediately fulfil its commitment to disband paramilitary forces presently operating as auxiliaries of the armed forces or with armed forces' complicity. Members of such forces responsible for human rights violations should be brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO**1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo  
 Presidente de la República  
 Palacio de Nariño  
 Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: President Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telexes: 44281 PALP CO**

**Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939**

**Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Gaviria**

2) Procurator General:

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta Padilla  
 Procurador General de la Nación  
 Procuraduría General  
 Edificio Banco Ganadero  
 Carrera 5, No. 15-80  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 342 9723**

**Salutation:Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Arrieta**

3) Advocate for the People:

Dr. Jaime Córdoba Triviño  
 Defensor del Pueblo  
 Defensoría del Pueblo  
 Calle 35, No.7-25, P.5  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams:Defensor del Pueblo Trivino, Defensoria del Pueblo Bogota, Colombia**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 288 6683**

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

4) Governor of Antioquia

Sr. Juan Gómez Martínez  
 Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia  
 Gobernación de Antioquia  
 Calle 42B, # 52-106  
 Medellín, Antioquia

**Telegrams:Gobernador de Antioquia Gomez Martinez**

**Gobernación de Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia**

**Faxes: (42) 518539**

**Salutation:Estimado Sr. Gómez Martínez/Dear Mr Gómez Martínez**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

Association for Relatives of the "Disappeared"

Señores  
 ASFADDES  
 AA 011446  
 Santa Fé 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 22 June 1994.