

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

COLOMBIA

José Humberto Torres Díaz (m), lawyer and human rights defender
Other members of the Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners (*Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, FCSP*)

José Humberto Torres Díaz, a lawyer working for the non-governmental human rights organization Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners (*Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, FCSP*), in the northern city of Barranquilla, department of Atlántico, has reportedly been kept under surveillance by unknown individuals, and his name has appeared on documents belonging to army-backed paramilitaries. His life may be in danger.

On 13 September the FCSP contacted the government authorities charged with coordinating government programmes to protect human rights defenders to express concern about the finding of a document by the Office of the Attorney General, *Fiscalía General de la Nación*, which included the name of José Humberto Torres Díaz, and his home address in Barranquilla. The Office of the Attorney General had reportedly discovered the document in March 2006 in the house of a regional paramilitary leader belonging to the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC*), a national army-backed paramilitary group. The document labelled José Humberto Torres Díaz as a member of the National Liberation Army guerrilla group (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN*). In the past, those accused by the security forces or their paramilitary allies of being members of guerrilla groups have frequently been the target of serious human rights violations committed by the same forces. The document with the name of José Humberto Torres Díaz also reportedly contained a list of names of people who have now been killed because of their alleged links with insurgent groups.

José Humberto Torres Díaz has played an active part in denouncing the role allegedly played by the paramilitary leader in the death of human rights defender Alfredo Correa de Andrés on 17 September 2004. José Humberto Torres Díaz claimed that according to criminal investigation documents, the paramilitary leader had counted on the support of the police and other security forces in carrying out the killing of the human rights defender. Alfredo Correa de Andrés had been detained by the Civilian Intelligence Service (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, DAS*), on 17 June 2004 and released a month later. In April 2006 a former senior ranking official of the DAS reported that the DAS had provided a "death list" to paramilitaries operating in the department of Atlántico. Alfredo Correa de Andrés's name was reportedly on this death list.

Concerns for the safety of José Humberto Torres Díaz are increased by reports that in recent weeks, armed men have reportedly maintained a presence near his home. José Humberto Torres' bodyguards reportedly established that the men's vehicles belonged to the National Police Intelligence Services (*Servicio de Inteligencia de la Policía Nacional, SIPOL*).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights defenders and others who have challenged the impunity of members of the security forces and paramilitaries have repeatedly been labelled as subversives by these forces. Security forces and paramilitaries have repeatedly followed these accusations by committing serious human rights violations. The security forces have also coordinated the initiation of arbitrary judicial proceedings against these individuals, usually on charges of subversion, which are not based on substantive evidence or full and impartial investigations. These cases repeatedly collapse, but human rights defenders who have been stigmatized by these arbitrary proceedings frequently face death threats or have been killed. José Humberto

Torres Díaz was cleared on 5 August 2005 of accusations apparently leveled against him in a military intelligence document which had come to the attention of the FCSPP. He was subsequently forced to leave the country for several months as a result of concerns for his safety.

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

- expressing concern for safety of José Humberto Torres Díaz and his family, following reports that his name has appeared on documents held by army-backed paramilitaries and that he is being kept under surveillance by individuals believed to be members of the National Police Intelligence Services (*Servicio de Inteligencia de la Policía Nacional, SIPOL*);
- calling on the authorities to take effective action to protect José Humberto Torres Díaz and other members of the Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners (*Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, FCSPP*), as deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves, thus allowing them to continue their legitimate and important work in the defense of human rights in safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, and asking that the results of the investigation 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 stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations;
- calling on the authorities to elaborate policy and plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders, regarding the implementation of the principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and to make these plans public.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 337 5890 / 342 0592

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

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dra. María Consuelo Araújo

Ministra de Relaciones Exteriores

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

Calle 10 No 5-51, Palacio de San Carlos, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 562 7822

Salutation: Dear Madam / Sra. Ministra

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán

Fiscal General de la Nación

Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Germán/ Dear Mr Germán

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Ombudsman

Sr. Volmar Antonio Pérez Ortiz, Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,

Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 oficina 301, Bogotá, Colombia

Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners

Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos,

Calle 26 No. 4 A-45, piso 12 torre KLM, Apartado Aéreo 22803, Bogotá, D.C., 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 November 2006.