

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 23/44/95

UA 188/95

Fear for safety

31 July 1995

COLOMBIA Omar GARCÍA

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Omar García, witness to the arrest in 1993 of two men who subsequently "disappeared", has been receiving death threats as one of the two police officers implicated in the "disappearances" is about to go on trial. Another witness to the arrests was killed in 1994, heightening fears for Omar García's safety.

Leandro Salazar and Calixto Ramos were arbitrarily detained by members of the National Police on 13 March 1993 in the Municipality of La Argentina, department of Huila, and subsequently taken to the La Argentina police station. They have not been seen since (see UA 111/93, AMR 23/21/93, 14 April 1993).

Penal investigations into the "disappearance" of the two men led to a judicial order for the arrest of a police sergeant for his part in the "disappearance."

On 3 March 1995 the *Procuraduría Delegada para los Derechos Humanos*, Office of the Procurator-Delegate for Human Rights, found the police sergeant guilty in disciplinary investigations against him and ordered his dismissal from the police force. The *Juzgado Segundo Penal del Circuito de La Plata*, Second Penal Court of the La Plata Circuit of the department of Huila has recently announced that the criminal trial would commence on 3 August at 8am.

The forthcoming trial has heightened fears for the safety of Omar García, who witnessed the abduction by the police of Leandro Salazar and Calixto Ramos. He has received repeated written and verbal death threats since November 1994 in an attempt to intimidate him into not testifying. On 16 July 1994, another witness to the abduction, Luis Angel Sánchez, was shot dead at point blank range by gunmen in the village of El Pescador, municipality of La Argentina, where he lived.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years widespread and systematic human rights violations have occurred in Colombia, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearance", torture and arbitrary arrest. President Ernesto Samper Pizano has repeatedly pledged his government's commitment to protect human rights and to tackle impunity. However, members of the Colombian armed and security forces continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Relatives of victims of human rights violations together with witnesses are often subject to death threats, extrajudicial executions and "disappearance" carried out by members of the security forces and their paramilitary allies, in an effort to prevent them testifying in human rights investigations or denouncing human rights violations. Only exceptionally are perpetrators brought to justice; the vast majority of members of the armed forces responsible for gross human rights violations remain in active service.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Omar García who has been receiving death threats in an attempt to intimidate him into not testifying in court in the case of the "disappearance" of Leandro Salazar and Calixto Ramos on 13 March 1993 in which members of the police are implicated;
- urging that full and impartial investigations are undertaken into these threats and the possible extrajudicial execution of another witness, Luis Angel Sánchez, in July 1994, that the results be made public and those responsible be brought to justice;

- urging that all measures, deemed appropriate by Omar García, are implemented to ensure his safety and that of his family;
- calling for full and impartial investigations to establish the whereabouts of Leandro Salazar and Calixto Ramos.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano  
Presidente de la República  
Palacio de Nariño  
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**

2) Minister of Defence

Dr. Fernando Botero Zea  
Ministro de Defensa Nacional  
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional  
Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams:Ministro de Defensa Botero, Bogota, Colombia**

**Telexes:42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 222 1874**

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

3) Minister of the Interior

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe  
Ministro del Interior  
Ministerio del Interior  
Carrera 8a, No.8-09, Piso 7  
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

**Telegrams: Ministro del Interior Serpa, Bogota, Colombia**

**Telexes:45406 MINGO CO**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 286 8025 / 286 0053 / 286 0485**

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

**COPIES TO:**

Association for Relatives of the "Disappeared"

Señores  
ASFADDES  
AA 011446  
Santafé 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 15 September 1995.