

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 297/93 Fear for Safety

31 August 1993

COLOMBIA: Dr. Rafael BARRIOS MENDIVIL, human rights lawyer

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Dr. Rafael Barrios Mendivil, a human rights lawyer who has been the subject of death threats, apparently as a result of his work in defence of human rights.

Recently, Dr. Barrios has received telephone threats and has been followed by security force agents. Dr. Barrios is the president of the human rights lawyers association, Corporación Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo, and has worked on numerous important cases of human rights violations in Colombia in which members of the police and army are implicated.

One case involves the killing of 17 people on a public transport bus in Los Uvos, department of Cauca in Southern Colombia on 7 April 1991 by members of the army. In April 1993 the Procurator General's Office accused members of the army of carrying out the massacre and requested the further investigation of an army general, three majors, a colonel and a lieutenant for covering up the crime. The Procurator also found irregularities in the investigation carried out by the military court and recommended disciplinary proceedings.

In August 1993 Dr. Barrios has been followed by vehicles believed to belong to the army.

Another case involves the massacre of at least 20 Paez Indians on 16 December 1991 by members of the Colombian police force. The indians were members of an indigenous community which had been occupying a ranch called "El Nilo" near the town of Caloto also in Cauca department. A report prepared by the Special Investigations Unit of the Procurator General's office in October 1992 stated that although it had not yet been possible to establish motives for the massacre, strong evidence had emerged of the responsibility of national police officials in the massacre. Despite all the evidence, on 21 July 1993, the Procurator General's office issued a ruling absolving the two police officials. One month after the Procurator's exoneration, the People's Advocate, (*Defensor del Pueblo*), formally requested the Public Ministry reconsider its 21 July ruling.

Two other lawyers working on behalf of the Paez indians have been killed, apparently as a result of their work on the case and Dr. Barrios has received repeated threats and harassment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights lawyers and members of human rights organizations have come under increasing attack in Colombia. Abuses in recent years have included threats, harassment and, in some cases, "disappearance" and possible extrajudicial execution. Many such attacks have been attributed to paramilitary organizations operating with the support or the acquiescence of the Colombian

armed forces; in other cases, however, army commanders are reported to have personally threatened a leading human rights lawyer with death.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Dr. Rafael Barrios Medivil seemingly as a result of his legal work on human rights cases;

- urging that there be an immediate inquiry into the death threats, in order to identify all those responsible and bring them to justice, the results of which should be made public;

- urging the Colombian government to take all possible measures to guarantee that Dr. Rafael Barrios Medivil and other human rights workers are able to carry out their lawful activities.

APPEALS TO

1) Procurator General:

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

Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 284 0472

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

2) Attorney General

Dr. Gustavo de Greiff
Fiscal General de la Nación
Fiscalía General de la Nación
Apartado Aéreo 29855
Santafé de Bogotá
Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 287 0939

Salutation: Estimado Dr. de Greiff / Dear Dr. de Greiff

3) Advocate for the People:

Dr. Jaime Córdoba Triviño
Defensor del Pueblo
Defensoría del Pueblo
Avenida 39, No. 16-42
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

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

Faxes:+ 57 1 232 4640

Salutation: Estimado Dr Triviño / Dear Dr. Triviño

4) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7324/7434/287 7937

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Gaviria

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Corporación Colectivo de Abogados

A.A. 44456

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 12 October 1993.