

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats

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COLOMBIA: Edwar ALVAREZ VACCA, aged 20, human rights activist

and other members of the Equipo Coordinadora par la
Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de Ocaña

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Edwar Alvarez Vacca and other members of the Equipo Coordinadora para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de Ocaña, Coordinating Team for the Defense of Human Rights in the municipality of Ocaña, Norte de Santander department, following harassment and threats to their lives.

Edwar Alvarez has been actively involved in community and human rights work from a young age and has been the victim of much harassment as a result. When he was sixteen years old an unsuccessful attempt was reportedly made to abduct him, by unknown persons, as he was taking part in a conference on community action in Valledupar, Cesar department. On 6 September 1990, during a march which he organized and led, recognized members of police intelligence, F-2, attempted to force Edwar Alvarez into a van, but the presence of many witnesses prevented his abduction. Edwar Alvarez was standing as the official representative of the community organizations of Ocaña in the elections for the National Constituent Assembly. Since that time, both he and his family have been the victims of increased threats and harassment and have been forced to move home several times. In May 1991 harassment increased again following Edwar Alvarez' public denunciation of the alleged "disappearance" of peasant leader Giovanni Ortiz Torrado by the F-2. He was reportedly summoned to the base of the IVth District of the National Police of Ocaña, Comando del IV Distrito de la Policia Nacional de Ocaña, where he was interrogated concerning the basis for his denunciation of Giovanni Ortiz' "disappearance" and also concerning the other members of the Human Rights Coordinating Team.

In the last year, Ocaña's community organizations have initiated a campaign of human rights education and the denunciation of human rights abuses in the largely rural and underdeveloped province. The Human Rights Coordinating Team of Ocaña, in addition to denouncing many cases of human rights violations by the armed and security forces, has reportedly been providing assistance to relatives of victims of "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution in areas targeted by the military during counter-insurgency operations. On 24-25 August 1991 the Coordinating Team held a regional human rights forum in Ocaña, which was attended by more than a thousand people, mostly from the surrounding area. However both in the period before the Forum and after it took place, reports of human rights violations continued, including threats, arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial executions.

Shortly after the Forum, on 10 September, the Coordinating Team received an anonymous threat addressed to *La defensa de los bandoleros y las comunistas de la región de Ocaña*, the defenders of the bandits and communists of Ocaña, in which they were accused of being a front for the guerrillas, and the forum where the guerrillas were given their instructions. "*Cuidanse señores comunistas de los derechos humanos...déjen de tener este organismo de derechos humanos como fachada...lo van a pagar bien caro*", "take care, human rights

communists...stop using this organization as a facade...you're going to pay heavily for it".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

President César Gaviria Trujillo has repeatedly pledged his government to protect human rights. In his inaugural address in August 1990, he said that "the public opinion's trust and credibility in the armed forces depend on the armed forces' acting according to the constitution. The armed forces must respect human rights because the country's defence also means upholding the law". However, despite the government's commitment to uphold respect for human rights, members of the Colombian armed forces have continued to commit serious abuses, including torture, extrajudicial execution and "disappearance". Human rights defenders have increasingly been among the victims of such abuses.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern for the safety of Edwar Alvarez and other members of the Coordinating Team for the Defense of Human Rights in Ocaña, following the receipt of threats to their lives;
- urging that there be an immediate investigation into the death threats and harassment in order to identify those responsible and bring them to justice;
- urging the Colombian government to take all possible measures to protect human rights workers and ensure that they are able to carry out their lawful activities.

APPEALS TO

President of the Republic:

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