

# URGENT ACTION

## ENVIRONMENTALIST FEARED DISAPPEARED

On 17 February Colombian environmentalist Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego may have been subjected to enforced disappearance in Cali, western Colombia, on her way to give a lecture at the National University in nearby Palmira. Her identity card, mobile phone and other personal belongings have been found, but her whereabouts remain unknown.



**Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego** is an environmentalist who used to work for the NGO CENSAT Agua Viva/ Friends of the Earth Colombia. Currently she is the director of the NGO *Surviviendo*, working on issues related to water, river basin and wetlands area protection in Valle del Cauca department, south-west of the country. In the past, human rights defenders working on environmental protection in Colombia have been threatened, forcibly disappeared and killed for their work.

In the 15 days before she went missing, she was developing an environmental management plan for the municipality of Yumbó, Valle del Cauca Department, with the local community. She also had been working with the Yanacóna Indigenous People on the Cauca River and had given interviews to promote the activities the Indigenous People were carrying out to ensure the protection of the river. On 18 February, one day after she was last seen, Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego was due to participate in a forum on water issues in Cali.

On 19 February her family was informed that her identity card was found close to where she was going to take a bus to the university, and later her mobile phone was found at another location nearby. Given that human rights defenders working on environmental protection in Colombia have been threatened, forcibly disappeared and killed for their work, Amnesty International believe she may have been the victim of an enforced disappearance.

### PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego;
- Calling on the authorities to do everything necessary to establish the whereabouts of Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego, and to guarantee her safety and to order a full and impartial investigation into her possible enforced disappearance, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Reminding them to fulfil their obligations regarding the situation of human rights defenders, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 APRIL 2011 TO:

#### Vicepresidente

Señor Angelino Garzón  
Vicepresidente de la República  
Vicepresidencia  
Carrera 8A No 7-27  
Bogotá Colombia  
Fax: +57 1 444 2158

**Salutation: Dear Vice-President  
Garzón/**

**Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente Garzón**

#### Minister of Interior and Justice

Señor Germán Vargas Lleras  
Ministerio Del Interior y De Justicia  
Carrera 9a. No. 14-10, Bogotá,  
Colombia  
Fax: +57 1 599 8961

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

#### **And copies to:**

#### Attorney General

Señora Viviane Morales  
Fiscal General de la Nación  
Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán  
No. 52-01) Bloque C  
Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia  
Fax: +57 1 570 2091

**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/  
Estimada Sra. Fiscal General**

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

While working with CENSAT Agua Viva/ Friends of the Earth Colombia, Sandra Viviane Cuellar Gallego campaigned for a water referendum, an initiative to declare water a fundamental right, to guarantee free access to a minimum vital amount, to protect essential ecosystems and the public management of water and sewage. The campaign ended unsuccessfully in 2010.

Colombian NGOs and human rights defenders have received threats following their participation in events related to defence of their territory, their natural resources, the environment and the right to lead a life with dignity. Often this has included work with Afro-descendant and Indigenous People. (see Defenders in Colombia receive death threat, UA: 237/10 Index: AMR 23/034/2010 Issue Date: 12 November 2010).

Six men in Cauca department, western Colombia, including Afro-descendant and Indigenous community leaders, all received the same threatening SMS (text) message simultaneously on 4 December 2009. They had been active in a campaign by local communities to oppose further development of a hydroelectric project in the area where they live and work, including the diversion of the river, as well as large-scale gold-mining by multinational corporations in the region. The communities fear that these large scale developments would make it difficult for them to maintain their livelihood and their culture. (see Six Colombians threatened via text message Further information on UA: 293/09 Index: AMR 23/031/2009 Issue Date: 10 December 2009). Other human rights defenders working on environmental issues have been threatened; forcibly disappeared and killed previously in Colombia.

UA: 48/11 Index: AMR 23/002/2011 Issue Date: 28 February 2011

