

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Colombia: another human rights defender killed**

Amnesty International today condemned the killing of human rights defender Alexander Quintero on 23 May in Santander de Quilichao in the south-western region of Cauca, and called on the authorities to ensure the killing is effectively investigated, and to once and for all ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their legitimate work free from fear.

Alexander Quintero, who for years had been campaigning in favour of truth, justice and reparation for the victims of the paramilitary Naya massacre in 2001 in which more than 30 people were killed and more than 70 forcibly disappeared, was shot dead by four unknown gunmen on motorbikes as he made his way home by foot with his family in the town centre.

Alexander Quintero, who was the president of the Alto Naya Association of Community Action Councils and represented victims of paramilitary groups in the Justice and Peace process, had received repeated death threats as a consequence of his human rights work.

There has been an increase in threats against and killings of witnesses, victims' families, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, and human rights defenders involved in criminal cases into human rights abuses committed in the context of the long-running internal armed conflict.

In particular, human rights defenders campaigning for truth, justice and reparation in the context of the Justice and Peace process, such as Alexander Quintero, and for the return of lands stolen by paramilitary groups have been particularly vulnerable to attack.

Human rights defender and land rights activist Rogelio Martínez, was gunned down by armed assailants on 18 May in San Onofre, in the north-western department of Sucre.

Guerrilla groups, paramilitaries and the security forces have over the years also threatened and killed countless members of Community Action Councils. These representatives are elected to their positions by local community members. They act as spokespeople and leaders for the community, manage limited state funds for local projects (which the various factions often wish to control) and are often the first point of contact for victims of human rights abuses.

Such threats and killings, especially of those seeking justice for human rights abuses, will only serve to reinforce the already scandalous rates of impunity in the country, and throws into serious doubts government claims that significant progress is being made in bringing to justice those responsible for committing human rights abuses in the context of the conflict.

Amnesty International once again asks the Colombian authorities to take seriously their responsibility to ensure that human rights defenders are effectively protected so that they can carry out their work safely and free from fear and to carry out an immediate and impartial investigation into the killing and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

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Public Document

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