

4 February 1999

Further information on Extra 12/99 (AMR 23/04/99, 29 January 1999) - Fear for safety / "disappearance"

COLOMBIA Colombian Human Rights Defenders

Jairo Bedoya] human rights workers with the
Olga Rodas (f)] *Instituto Popular de Capacitación*
Jorge Salazar] (IPC), Popular Training Institute
Claudia Tamayo (f)]

On 1 February 1999, Carlos Castaño, head of the national paramilitary organization *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, said the AUC was holding the four recently abducted human rights defenders as "prisoners of war".

He also threatened all Colombian human rights defenders, saying "we have respected the majority [of defenders]..., even though we know who they are and where they are. But enough is enough!" (*Aún así hemos respetado la gran mayoría, conociendo quienes son y dónde están. Basta ya!*) He said that the "abduction of the (IPC) [Popular Training Institute] members... marks the beginning of a regrettable, but inevitable stage in the conflict... We do not want to create panic in the NGOs, but we do call for a purge of guerrillas from said organizations, a call extended to the Human Rights Unit of the Attorney General's Office." (*La retención de los miembros de IPC ...marca el inicio de una lamentable, pero inevitable etapa del conflicto... No deseamos crear pánico al interior de las ONG, pero hacemos un llamado a que se depure de guerrilleros la composición de dicha organizaciones, llamado extensivo a la Unidad de Derechos Humanos de la Fiscalía*). He said that the IPC members would not be freed until the end of the conflict or until the armed opposition ends its practice of kidnapping civilians. The armed forces and their paramilitary allies have frequently labelled human rights defenders as guerilla auxiliaries or supporters in an attempt to undermine their work and present them as legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war.

The AUC gave no proof that the IPC workers are still alive.

Amnesty International believes that the IPC members cannot under any circumstances be considered "prisoners of war", since they are civilians, not combatants. Their release therefore cannot be part of negotiations to end the conflict or of any possible exchange for military and police personnel captured by armed opposition.

Two human rights defenders were killed on 30 January (see UA 19/99, AMR 23/07/99, 1 February 1999) and, according to press reports, another was killed in Medellín the next day. Fabian Beltrán Arenas, who worked with the *Oficina de Paz y Convivencia*, Office for Peace and Co-existence, in the municipality of Bello, Medellín, was reportedly shot and killed at a meeting attended by the local mayor. A trade unionist is also reported to have been killed in the same incident.

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

- condemning the abduction by the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, of Jairo Bedoya, Olga Rodas, Jorge Salazar and Claudia Tamayo, from the offices of the *Instituto Popular de Capacitación*

(IPC), Popular Training Institute, in Medellín, capital of Antioquia Department;

- calling on the authorities to take immediate action to ensure their release;
- expressing grave concern for the safety of all human rights defenders after the threats made by the AUC and asking for improved protection in line with United Nations recommendations and as agreed by the government;
- expressing concern that the recent abduction and killing of Colombian human rights defenders demonstrate that government steps to protect them are insufficient and ineffective;
- saying that human rights defenders will continue to be the targets of attacks by paramilitaries unless effective action is taken to dismantle paramilitary groups.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia, Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 286 7434

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of Defence, Dr. Rodrigo Lloreda, Ministro de Defensa Nacional, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of the Interior, Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No. 8-09, Piso 2, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Faxes: + 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405 / 286 0053 / 341 9739

COPIES TO: Instituto Popular de Capacitación (IPC), Apartado Aéreo 9690, Medellín, Antioquia, 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 4 March 1999.