

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER'S LIFE IN DANGER

The life of Luz Elsia Almanza, a female human rights defender in Colombia, is in danger, after a paramilitary group declared her to be a "military target". Luz Elsia Almanza works to end impunity in cases of enforced disappearances in Colombia.

On 18 November, **Luz Elsia Almanza**, the coordinator of the Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos, ASFADDES) in the city of Barrancabermeja in northern Colombia, received a threatening SMS (text) message on her mobile phone, from an unidentified caller. The text message read "Ms. Luz Almanza this is to let you know that you as representative of the organization which you are leading are declared a military target, sincerely self defence forces" (*Señora Luz Almanza el siguiente es para decir, que usted como representante de esta organización que lidera es delarada objetivo militar, atentamente Autodefensas*). A second text message followed saying "Gaitanistas". The Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces (*Autodefensas Gaitanistas*) are a paramilitary group operating in northern Colombia.

Since the beginning of this year Luz Elsia Almanza's home and the ASFADDES office have been watched by unknown men. The most recent surveillance of her home happened on 26 November in the afternoon when two men on a motorbike were riding around the neighbourhood, slowing down when they passed her house. Since 22 November there have been rumours circulating in Barrancabermeja that her name is on a list of people who the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces are planning to kill. On 23 April she had been approached by two men who had identified themselves as paramilitaries and who had threatened her verbally for being a human rights defender.

On 15 November, one woman, Gloria Gómez, and two men, César Muñoz and Diego Castillo, all from the national ASFADDES office in Bogotá, came to Barrancabermeja to interview relatives of victims of enforced disappearance. They had to stop the interviews as they were being watched by two men with walkie-talkies, who tried to enter the building where the meeting was held, saying that they were relatives of somebody who was inside the building.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Luz Elsia Almanza, her family and other members of ASFADDES, urging the authorities to guarantee their safety in accordance with their wishes;
- Calling on the authorities to carry out a full and impartial investigation into this threat and previous incidents of harassment;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations;
- Reminding the authorities to adhere to their obligations to support the work of human rights defenders, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 08 JANUARY 2010 TO:

Vice-President of the Republic
Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón
Vicepresidencia de la República
Carrera 8A No 7-27
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 565 7682 (say: "me da tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Dear Mr Vice-president/Estimado Sr. Vicepresidente

Acting Attorney General

Sr. Guillermo Mendoza Diago (e)
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación
Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C, Piso 4,
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 414 91 08

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Estimado Sr. Fiscal

And copies to:

Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (ASFADDES)
Calle 77 No. 14-47
Oficina: 501 – Edificio Santa Lucia
Bogotá, Colombia

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

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Luz Elsia Almanza received the threatening SMS message while she was in a meeting at the Barrancabermeja mayors' office to discuss establishing 16 May as a Victims' Day in the city. The objective of this proposal was to commemorate a paramilitary massacre which took place in Barrancabermeja on 16 May 1998. Luz Elsia Almanza's partner was the victim of an enforced disappearance following the massacre. For years, nobody was detained for their part in the massacre, but this year four people have been detained. One suspect is being called to testify before the courts on 30 November.

In July 2008, Luz Elsia Almanza's son, then aged 15, was stopped by two heavily armed men on a football field. They told him that he should be careful as they knew what his mother was doing.

ASFADDES is a national non-governmental human rights organization made up of relatives of victims of enforced disappearance, who work to find out what has happened to their relatives and bring those responsible to justice. Luz Elsia Almanza has been coordinating the Barrancabermeja branch of ASFADDES since the reopening of the office in late 2008, following a temporary closure for security concerns. Together with other members of ASFADDES in Barrancabermeja she has been seeking the whereabouts of their relatives and campaigning to bring to justice those responsible for such human rights violations.

During Colombia's 40-year-old armed conflict, members of human rights organizations, trade unions and other social organizations have often suffered threats, enforced disappearance or killings. Colombia's paramilitary groups supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003, but it is clear from the threats against human rights organizations and trade unions, in Barrancabermeja and elsewhere, that they are still operating.

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