

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

15 May 1998

COLOMBIA Human rights workers of the Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace

There are serious fears for the safety of human rights defenders attached to the *Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz*, Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace (CIJP), following a search of their Bogotá offices on 13 May 1998 by members of the Colombian Army and judicial officials.

During the search soldiers reportedly forced two nuns working in the office to kneel on the floor and interrogated them while pointing guns to their heads. They also took their photographs. A soldier also filmed several human rights workers who had gathered outside the building while the search was taking place.

The warrant to search the CIJP offices was apparently issued by the judicial authorities on the basis of a military intelligence report, which allegedly stated that the CIJP, a national non-governmental human rights organization, had information relating to an urban guerrilla network.

The military denied members of the *Defensoría del Pueblo*, Office of the People's Defender, access to the Justice and Peace building, despite being legally authorized to monitor such operations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The search of the CIJP office comes in the wake of the killing on 18 April 1998 of Dr Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, a prominent Colombian human rights lawyer who had received numerous threats as a result of his human rights work (see UA 122/98, AMR 23/22/98, 20 May 1998).

Over recent years human rights defenders have increasingly been accused by high ranking members of the Colombian armed forces of supporting subversive groups. Human rights work has been presented as limiting the capacity of the armed forces to fight guerrilla forces.

In the past those labelled "subversive" or "subversive sympathizers" by the armed forces or their paramilitary allies have frequently become victims of death threats and even killings.

The United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights' Report on Colombia (E/CN.4/1998/16, 9 March 1998) quoted members of the military intelligence as stating that 85 per cent of the persons they considered to be subversive were engaged in the "political war", a military term which included the activities of some NGOs.

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

- expressing concern that during the search of the CIJP offices on 13 May 1998 some human rights defenders were intimidated;
- expressing concern for the safety of human rights workers who were filmed during the operation;
- urging that all measures deemed appropriate by human rights workers themselves are taken to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern for the safety of all human rights workers in Colombia during the present climate of threats and harassment.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
carrera 8 No. 7-26
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

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

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

Attorney General

Dr.Alfonso Gómez Méndez
Fiscal General de la Nación
Fiscalia General de la Nación
Diagonal 22B 5201, Apartado Aéreo 29855
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General, Fiscalia General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 571 570 2000 (when ansaphone picks up dial 2017 for fax)

Salutation: Estimado Dr./ Dear Dr.

Minister of Defence

Dr.Gilberto Echeverri Mejía
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

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz
AA 31861
Santafé de Bogotá
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 26 June 1998.