

URGENT ACTION

LAND RIGHTS DEFENDERS RECEIVE DEATH THREATS

Colombian NGOs and human rights defenders working on land restitution issues around the country have been subject to numerous death threats in recent weeks. The messages were sent by paramilitaries calling themselves the Anti Land Restitution Army.

“Death to all members of associations, like the snitches who work on land restitution” (*muerte a todos los miembros de asociaciones, como los sapos que trabajan en la restitución de tierras*) read an email, sent by the Anti Land Restitution Army on 2 October to the NGOs Humanidad Vigente and others such as the Happy Childhood Foundation (Fundación Infancia Feliz, FIF) and the Women’s Rights Collective (Colectivo Mujeres al Derecho). The threat names NGOs and human rights defenders and others working on issues related to land restitution and women and children’s rights in several regions of Colombia and accuses them of being guerrillas by labelling them “FARC and ELN narco-terrorists” (*narco terroristas de las FARC y ELN*).

The same day, another death threat signed by the Anti Land Restitution Army was sent by text message to human rights defenders and leaders of peasant farmer organizations in Carmen de Bolívar, northern Colombia.

These death threats are part of a recent wave of threats, attacks and killings. On 24 August **Rosario Montoya Hoyos**, a member of FIF, received a condolence card for her own death. A few days later on 28 August, two hooded men came into the FIF office and beat **Sandra Manjarras**, the Director of FIF, demanding she hand over documents and information.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of the individuals and NGOs named in the email (see overleaf) and urging the authorities to protect them, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- Calling on the authorities to order full and impartial investigations into the death threats, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Reminding the authorities to fulfil their obligation to protect human rights defenders, as set out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 NOVEMBER 2012 TO:

President

Señor Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente de la República, Palacio de
 Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá,
 Colombia

Fax: +57 1 596 0631

Salutation: Dear President

Santos/Excmo. Sr. Presidente Santos

Minister of Interior

Señor Fernando Carrillo
 Ministro del Interior
 Carrera 9a No 14-10, piso 8
 Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 283 9876

Salutation: Dear Minister/

Estimado Sr. Ministro

And copies to:

Humanidad Vigente (NGO)

Carrera 28 # 47A-84

Bogotá

Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives 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

In the course of Colombia's long-running armed conflict millions of hectares of land have been misappropriated, often through violence, from the rightful owners, especially Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendent and peasant farmer communities. The various parties to the conflict –paramilitaries and the security forces, either acting alone or in collusion with each other, and guerrilla groups - have driven over five million people from their homes.

Leaders of displaced communities and those seeking the return of stolen lands have been killed or threatened, especially since the Land and Victims Restitution Law was approved in June 2011 and came into force at the beginning of 2012. This law acknowledges the existence of an armed conflict in the country, and the rights of its victims. It provides for reparations for many survivors of human rights abuses, including those perpetrated by state agents. However, many other victims of the conflict will be excluded from making claims for reparation, while significant areas of stolen land might still not be returned to their rightful owners. There are not enough safeguards to ensure that people whose land is returned to them are not forced to again hand over control over their land, even to those who had driven them off it. Many of those campaigning for land restitution, or seeking to return to their lands, have been threatened or killed, and this may undermine the implementation of the law.

Since February 2012 paramilitary forces who call themselves “anti restitution armies” have been reported in several parts of Colombia. The paramilitary “Anti Land Restitution Army”, which some estimates suggest is 1,000 strong, began taking action in July 2012 in the Montes de María area of the north-western Departments of Bolívar and Sucre.

During the armed conflict in Colombia, which has lasted over four decades, the security forces and paramilitary groups have frequently labelled human rights organizations and trade unions as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, and have gone on to threaten, abduct or kill them. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders and trade unionists they consider to be siding with their enemies.

Colombia's paramilitary groups supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003, but it is clear from the continuing threats against human rights defenders and other vulnerable groups in different parts of the country that they are still operating.

Name: Members of Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, Fundación para el Desarrollo y la Paz (FUNDEPAZ), Organización Nacional de Población Desplazada Desarraigada Independiente (OPDDI), Marcha Patriótica, Cabildo Abierto por la Independencia, Asociación de Familiares por un Solo Dolor (AFUSODO), Colectivo Mujeres al Derecho, Fundación Infancia Feliz (FIF), Fundación Comité Presos Políticos (FCSP), Corporación Jurídica Humanidad Vigente, Coordinación Nacional de Desplazados (CND), Polo Democrático (both)

Misael Delgado Rada (m) and members of his family (both),

Iván Cepeda, Ospino Meza, Hipólito Rennería, Fredy Guerrero, Felipe Flor (m)

Rosario Montoya Hoyos, Sandra Manjares, Piedad Córdoba, Rosario Aguilar, Miryam Clemencia Ruiz Molina, Alfonso Caicedo, Sister Alba Estela (f)

Gender: both