

Global action to support Colombian human rights defenders under attack

As Colombian human rights defenders remember today those who have been killed for their work, Amnesty International members and human rights defenders all over the world will take action in their support.

On this day in 1997 human rights activists Elsa Alvarado and Mario Calderón were killed in their home in Bogotá. Masked gunmen overpowered the doorman, forcibly entered the apartment and killed them with sub-machine gun fire. Elsa's father was also killed in the attack and her mother was seriously injured.

Today, Amnesty International members and activists around the world will hold vigils, fasts and demonstrations to mark the killing of the many Colombian human rights activists who have lost their lives in the name of defending internationally recognized human rights.

While there have been some advances made in bringing to trial those responsible for the killing of Elsa Alvarado and Mario Calderón, Amnesty International is alarmed that scant progress has been made on the cases of more than 25 human rights defenders killed in Colombia over the past five years.

"The failure of the Colombian authorities to bring to justice those responsible for these crimes clearly demonstrates that, in spite of official rhetoric, the safety of Colombian human rights defenders is not a priority for the government," the organization said.

"As the human rights crisis in Colombia worsens, the work of these courageous individuals is more necessary than ever. And still the Colombian government has not taken satisfactory measures to stop attacks against them."

"Providing bullet-proof vests and security equipment for office premises is not enough. Until those who order and plan attacks against human rights defenders are brought to justice further human rights violations will continue to be committed," Amnesty International said, noting the authorities' constant failure to heed calls by the international community to adopt a comprehensive approach to the protection of human rights defenders.

"Despite the threats, harassment and attacks they face, Colombian human rights defenders continue in their incessant work for the rights of all. Their determination encourages and inspires human rights defenders from all over Latin America," the organization added.

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