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COLOMBIA: GOVERNMENTAL PROMISES RING HOLLOW AS ANOTHER HUMAN RIGHTS WORKER IS KILLED

In the wake of the killing of Josué Giraldo Cardona, the Colombian Government should take immediate action to ensure the safety of human rights workers and political activists, Amnesty International said today.

Josué Giraldo Cardona, President of the Meta Civic Human Rights Committee and a member of the legal opposition party, the *Unión Patriótica* (UP), was outside his home in Villavicencio on 13 October when a gunman approached him and opened fire.

“This latest killing shows that the Colombian Government’s public commitments to improve human rights in the country are sounding increasingly hollow,” Amnesty International said.

“Time and time again we have appealed to the authorities to guarantee the safety of members of the Meta Civic Human Rights Committee and human rights workers throughout Colombia. We have also called on the authorities to ensure that human rights violations are fully investigated and that perpetrators are brought to justice -- perhaps if this had been done, Josué Giraldo would still be alive today.”

The Colombian Government has publicly pledged itself to ensure the safety of human rights workers, but death threats and other human rights violations against human rights workers continue. The government has also made commitments to eradicate paramilitary groups which, working in alliance with the security forces, are responsible for many of the human rights violations, but has failed to take any action to end their illegal activities.

“If human rights workers are allowed to carry out their work freely then the fundamental rights of all Colombians will be better protected,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is also calling on the international community to commit itself to monitor and follow closely the actions the Colombian Government takes to investigate Josué Giraldo’s death and improve the human rights situation in the country.

**BACKGROUND**

Since its formation in December 1991, members of the Meta Civic Human Rights Committee have received death threats and been the victims of human rights violations. In 1992 four leading members of the Committee were killed. In its second year three members of the Committee were "disappeared". By February 1995 the Committee, which four years previously had represented 32 social organizations, had only seven member-organizations. Faced with continuing death threats many of the members were forced to leave Meta department and the Committee was forced to suspend its activities in early 1995. Josué Giraldo himself received numerous death threats.

In August 1995, a commission made up of the Committee together with other non-governmental organizations and government representatives, was set up to examine the human rights situation and create a safe area in which human rights workers would have some protection whilst continuing their work. But the death threats continued and Josué Giraldo was forced to leave the country temporarily. In March 1996, the Committee resigned from the commission complaining that state officials had presented the commission as a means of guaranteeing the safety of human rights workers, which clearly was not the case.

Josué Giraldo was also an activist for the UP. Members of the UP have been subjected to a systematic campaign of elimination since the party's formation in 1985. At the beginning of October 1992 the then Advocate for the People, Dr. Jaime Triviño Córdoba, published a report which concluded that the main perpetrators of violence against UP activists were paramilitary groups, members of the security forces and hired gunmen.

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