

UA 297/99

Fear for**COLOMBIA Iván Cepeda and Claudia Giron Ortiz ,human rights defenders**

A death threat received by Iván Cepeda Castro and Claudia Giron Ortiz of the *Fundación Manuel Cepeda*, Manuel Cepeda Foundation raises serious concern for their safety.

On 5 November 1999, Iván and Claudia returned to their flat in the capital Bogotá, to find a message recorded on their telephone answer machine in which a man's voice said that they would both be killed.

Amnesty International believes that the death threat is connected to legal proceedings against two members of the Colombian armed forces involved in the killing of Iván Cepeda's father, Manuel Cepeda Vargas, after whom the *Fundación* is named.

Manuel Cepeda Vargas was the only Senator in the Colombian Congress representing the *Unión Patriótica (UP)*, Patriotic Union Party, and the *Partido Comunista Colombiana (PCC)*, Colombian Communist Party. He was killed on 9 August 1994 in Bogotá. A paramilitary group calling itself *Muerte a Comunistas y Guerrilleros*, Death to Communists and Guerrillas claimed responsibility for the killing.

Following his father's killing, Iván Cepeda founded the *Fundación* in order to seek justice for killings of UP and PCC representatives. The government investigations into Manuel Cepeda Vargas's killing concluded that army Sergeants Justo Gilberto Zúñiga Labrador and Hernando Medina Camacho had carried out the attack on the orders of Brigadier General Rodolfo Herrera Luna, commander of the ninth Brigade of the Colombian army, who has since died. In June this year, the National Procurator ruled that the two sergeants be punished with a 'severe reprimand' for the crime. Criminal proceedings against the two army officers continue.

Outraged that, although nominally under arrest, the two officers remain in active service, the *Fundación Manuel Cepeda* recently urged that they be immediately dismissed from the armed forces. On August 12, Colombia's President, Andrés Pastrana, publically vowed to dismiss any state agents who commit human rights violations. Nevertheless, the two officers remain in active service.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since its creation in 1985 some 4,000 members of the UP have been killed. The majority of these deaths have been attributed to the Colombian security forces and their paramilitary allies. Few of the perpetrators have been brought to justice.

Human rights organizations, particularly those seeking to break through the impunity surrounding such cases, are frequently the victims of death threats and extrajudicial executions. In the last two years, more than 25 human rights defenders have been targeted and killed in Colombia. Many others have been forced to leave the country in fear for their lives.

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

- expressing grave concern for the safety of Iván Cepeda Castro and Claudia Giron Ortiz of the *Fundación Manuel Cepeda*;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate and effective steps, as deemed appropriate by those at risk, to guarantee the safety of Iván Cepeda, Claudia Giron and other members of the *Fundación Manuel Cepeda*;
- calling for a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the death threats received by Iván Cepeda and Claudia Giron on 5 November 1999;
- urging the Colombian government to adhere to the principles contained in the *UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* of December 1998, which states that, "The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration";
- calling for President Pastrana to stand by his commitment to dismiss agents of the state involved in human rights violations and to order the immediate dismissal of the two sergeants convicted of Manuel Cepeda's killing;

APPEALS TO:President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/ 284 2186/ 337 1351

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Vice-President of the Republic

Señor Vicepresidente Gustavo Bell Lemus
Alto Consejero Presidencial para asuntos de Derechos Humanos y lucha Contra la Corrupción

Cra. 8 #7-26, Palacio de Nariño,
Santafé de Bogotá

Fax: 5713371351

Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente/ Dear Vice-President

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña
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

National Procurator

Dr. Jaime Bernal Cuellar
Procurador General de la Nación
Procuraduría General de la Nación
Edificio Banco Ganadero
Carrera 5, No. 15-80
Santafé de Bogotá

COLOMBIA

Fax: 57 1 342 9723

Salutation: Sr.Procurador General de la Nación/Dear Procurator

COPIES TO:

Fundación Manuel Cepeda

A.A 28233

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 23 December 1999.