

UA 307/00

Fear for Safety / Death Threats

4 October 2000

COLOMBIA

Members of Credhos] human rights organisations

Members of Asfaddes]

Other human rights defenders in the Magdalena Medio region

Human rights defenders are in immediate danger after being declared "military targets" in leaflets, signed by a paramilitary group, circulated during a human rights conference.

The pamphlets were left in the bathrooms of the building in Barrancabermeja, Magdalena Medio region, where the conference was taking place on 29-30 September. They were signed by the army-backed paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia. The pamphlets accused human rights defenders of being "guerrillas" and referred to a death list held by the paramilitaries:

"Statement, Warning.....

The AUC have declared human rights workers and particularly members of Credhos, as guerrilla auxiliaries, therefore from this moment on we have made them military targets of our organisation....

The AUC as anti-subversives are going to carry out social cleansing in Barrancabermeja and the whole of Colombia, for a country free of kidnapping, extortion and dishonesty.

We have declared members of Credhos to be workers of the political wings of the FARC and ELN guerrillas, we know who and where these individuals are who don't do anything except report the crimes of the AUC and constantly attack us as enemies of the peace, and yet they don't publically report the crimes of the guerrillas...

We have in our hands a cleansing list and we're going to give a figure to those S.O.B. [Sons of Bitches] guerrillas that if they don't get out of here we'll kill them...

Credhos.....twenty-something members....get out S.O.B

Asfaddes.....three....and you know who you are, S.O.B."

The conference "*Por la vida y los Derechos Humanos*" ("In favour of life and Human Rights") was attended by activists from a wide range of Colombian social organisations, including human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It was co-hosted by the Colombian government and supported by foreign Embassy officials, the United Nations and international NGOs. The conference called for specific government commitments to protect human rights defenders.

The *Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (Credhos), Regional Human Rights Committee, is based in Barrancabermeja. Its members have played a vital role in drawing international attention to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by guerrillas, the security forces and paramilitaries. The *Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* (ASFADDES), Association of Families of the Detained Disappeared, is a national non-governmental human rights organization made up of families of the "disappeared", who work to find out what has happened to their relatives and bring those responsible to justice.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Paramilitary groups have killed several thousand civilians over the past five years. The Colombian government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989, yet they continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

The security forces and their paramilitary allies have a policy of labeling human rights organizations as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, so they

can present them as legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war. Over 25 human rights defenders have been killed or "disappeared" in the last three years.

Human rights defenders working with Credhos, Asfaddes and other NGOs in Barrancabermeja and the Magdalena Medio region have suffered continuous threats and harassment for carrying out their legitimate work to promote and protect internationally recognized human rights. In the past they have been the subject of death threats, killings and disappearances at the hands of the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Many have been killed and others have been forced to leave the region in fear for their lives. The Colombian authorities have so far failed to take action against paramilitary groups operating in the region.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defenders in Barrancabermeja, particularly Credhos workers and Asfaddes members nationally after a paramilitary statement declared them "military targets";
- urging a full and impartial investigation into the threats against Credhos and Asfaddes, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of Credhos and Asfaddes members, so that they can continue their work;
- urging the Colombian government to adhere to its obligations to protect human rights defenders, as set out through the United Nations and Organization of American States;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Barrancabermeja and the surrounding area, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 286 7434 / 287 7939 / 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 337 1351

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr Presidente

Minister of Interior

Dr. Humberto De La Calle

Ministro del Interior

Ministerio del Interior

Palacio Echeverry

Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 286 8025 / 286 8025 / 284 0214

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

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

Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Fax: + 57 1 222 1874 / 266 9300
Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

CREDHOS
AA 505
Barrancabermeja
Santander, Colombia

ASFADDES
AA 011446
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 15 November 2000.