

PUBLIC

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UA 251/01 Fear for safety

5 October 2001

**ECUADOR Luis Bermeo Jaramillo (m), Governor of Sucumbios Province**

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An Ecuadorian provincial governor who opposes the US military aid program to neighbouring Colombia, known as Plan Colombia, escaped with his life when a hand grenade was thrown at his car yesterday morning by men believed to be Colombian paramilitaries. Luis Bermeo Jaramillo is now in hospital. The authorities have not properly investigated previous death threats against him, and Amnesty International is concerned that his life is in grave danger.

Luis Bermeo Jaramillo was on his way to work in Nueva Loja when his car was attacked, reportedly by two men on motorbikes. One of the men was injured by the grenade, and is now in hospital. Police have reportedly identified him as a member of the Colombian paramilitary group known as United Self-defence Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC), which operates with the support or acquiescence of the Colombian army. The army and their paramilitary allies have been fighting a long-running conflict with left-wing guerrilla forces, who control large areas of the country.

Luis Bermeo Jaramillo is the Governor of Sucumbios Province, which borders Colombia. He is a member of the small indigenous political party *Pachakutic*. On many occasions he has openly criticized the US-backed military aid package known as Plan Colombia for its impact on the northern region of Ecuador that borders Colombia. In particular he has criticised the program of aerial spraying of herbicides, which is directed at coca plantations in Putumayo department in Colombia but extends to his own province of Sucumbios. The north of the province, where it borders Colombia, is largely jungle, inhabited mainly by indigenous communities. He has also criticised the construction of an oil pipeline in Ecuador, between Nueva Loja and Esmeraldas, Esmeraldas province, because of its impact on indigenous communities and the environment. He has reportedly received telephone death threats before now, and in August the police discovered explosives planted in his house. No one has been arrested or charged in connection with either the death threats or the explosives.

The police in Lago Agrio, Sucumbios province, raided an apartment last night and detained three men who are believed to have been involved in the attack. Two were Ecuadorian citizens and the third was Colombian. Police removed firearms and a motorbike. Following the arrests, the head of the police in Lago Agrio reportedly received a threatening phone call.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Plan Colombia was launched in January 2001. Since then Amnesty International has received reports of increasing violence in the Colombia-Ecuador border area. The herbicide spraying and military operations have driven hundreds of Colombian refugees to flee from Putumayo department to Ecuador.

Amnesty International has received reports of clashes between Ecuadorian armed forces and Colombian armed groups, and between Ecuadorian and Colombian armed groups in the last few months in the border area. More than 50 Colombian and Ecuadorian citizens have reportedly been killed in this area since Plan Colombia came into effect.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish, English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Luis Bermeo Jaramillo, Governor of Sucumbíos Province, who was attacked on 4 October;
- asking the authorities to do everything necessary to protect him, so he can continue his work as a public official in safety;
- asking the authorities to conduct a prompt and effective investigation into the attack and death threats received by Luis Bermeo Jaramillo, with the findings made public and those responsible brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO: Please note that it can be difficult getting through to fax numbers in Ecuador. Please be patient and keep trying. If a voice answers, ask "Por favor, me puede dar tono de fax."**

Minister of the Interior and Police

Dr. Marcelo Merlo Jaramillo  
Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía  
Benalcázar y Espejo  
Quito  
ECUADOR

**Fax: + 593 2 2580 067**

**Telegram: Ministerio de Gobierno, Quito, Ecuador**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister**

Congressional Human Rights Commission

Dr. Bolívar Sánchez Ribadeneira  
Presidente de la Comisión Especializada  
Permanente de Derechos Humanos  
del H. Congreso Nacional  
Luis Saá y Sodiro  
Edificación Daniel Cadena, 1° Piso, oficina 108  
Quito  
Ecuador

**Fax: + 593 2 2900 357**

**Salutation: Señor Presidente**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights Organization

Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos  
"Segundo Montes Mozo S.J."  
Av. 10 e Agosto N26-57 y Gral Vicente Aguirre  
Edif. Tauro, Of. 802  
Quito  
ECUADOR

and to diplomatic representatives of Ecuador accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 November 2001.