

URGENT ACTION

ENVIRONMENTALIST RECEIVES DEATH THREATS

Hildebrando Vélez, an environmentalist who has played a leading role in campaigning to establish the whereabouts of Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego, also an environmentalist, has received death threats. Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego went missing in Cali, western Colombia, on 17 February, and is feared to have been forcibly disappeared.

On 9 April, at approximately 7pm, **Hildebrando Vélez** returned to his house in Cali, in the south-western department of Valle del Cauca, and discovered that his computer's hard drive, his mobile telephone and a USB Memory Stick had been stolen. The equipment that was stolen contained information on the case of the possible enforced disappearance of **Sandra Viviana**. His house is registered as the headquarters of the environmental organization *Surviviendo*, of which Sandra Viviana is the director.

In previous days Hildebrando Vélez had received a number of death threats on his mobile telephone. The last of these was received on 8 April: "All bad people...Satan and his army ...very soon and instantly will be destroyed and annihilated forever, and they will never exist again" ("todas las personas malas...Satanás y su ejército... muy pronto y en breve serán destruidos y aniquilados para siempre, y nunca jamás volverán a la existencia").

Hildebrando Vélez has reported these threats to the anti-kidnapping and extortion unit of the security forces known as GAULA. These recent threats raise concerns that Sandra Viviana has been subject to enforced disappearance.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Hildebrando Vélez;
- Expressing concern for the safety of Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego;
- Calling on the authorities to undertake full and impartial investigations into the threats against Hildebrando Vélez and the theft of equipment containing information from his home, that the results be made public and all those responsible brought to justice;
- Calling on the authorities to do everything necessary to establish the whereabouts of Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego, and to guarantee her safety and to order a full and impartial investigation into her possible enforced disappearance, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Reminding them to fulfil their obligations regarding the situation of human rights defenders, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 26 MAY 2011 TO:

President

Señor Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631

**Salutation: Dear President Santos/
 Excmo. Sr. Presidente Santos**

Minister of Interior and Justice

Señor Germán Vargas Lleras
 Ministerio Del Interior y De Justicia
 Carrera 9a. No. 14-10, Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 599 8961

**Salutation: Dear Minister Vargas/
 Estimado Sr. Ministro Vargas**

And copies to:

Attorney General

Señora Viviane Morales
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C
 Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 570 2091

**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/
 Estimada Sra. Fiscal General**

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA48/11. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/002/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego is an environmentalist who used to work for the NGO CENSAT Agua Viva/ Friends of the Earth Colombia. Currently she is the director of the NGO *Surviviendo*, working on issues related to water, river basin and wetlands area protection in Valle del Cauca department, south-west of the country. In the past, human rights defenders working on environmental protection in Colombia have been threatened, forcibly disappeared and killed for their work.

In the 15 days before she went missing, she was developing an environmental management plan for the municipality of Yumbó, Valle del Cauca Department, with the local community. She also had been working with the Yanacóna Indigenous People on the Cauca River and had given interviews to promote the activities the Indigenous People were carrying out to ensure the protection of the river. On 18 February, one day after she was last seen, Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego was due to participate in a forum on water issues in Cali.

On 19 February her family was informed that her identity card was found close to where she was going to take a bus to the university, and later her mobile phone was found at another location nearby. Given that human rights defenders working on environmental protection in Colombia have been threatened, forcibly disappeared and killed for their work, Amnesty International believe she may have been the victim of an enforced disappearance.

Colombian NGOs and human rights defenders have received threats following their participation in events related to defence of their territory, their natural resources, the environment and the right to lead a life with dignity. Often this has included work with Afro-descendant and Indigenous People. (see Defenders in Colombia receive death threat, UA: 237/10 Index: AMR 23/034/2010 Issue Date: 12 November 2010). Those campaigning for justice in cases of human rights violations have themselves frequently been the target of threats and serious human rights violations.

Further information on UA: 48/11 Index: AMR 23/011/2011 Issue Date: 14 April 2011

