

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Colombia: The four defenders must be released immediately

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate release, as well as respect for the lives and personal safety, of human rights defenders Nohora Guerrero, Lizbeth Jaime, Mónica Duarte and María Angélica González who have reportedly been held by the guerrilla group *Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)*, National Liberation Army, since 9 July 2010. Lizbeth Jaime, Mónica Duarte and Nohora Guerrero, who are members of the *Fundación Progresar*, Progress Foundation, and María Angélica González, from the *Programa de Atención a Comunidades en Riesgo*, Care Programme for At-Risk Communities, at the Office of the Vice-President, were carrying out humanitarian work with displaced people in the town of Teorama, Norte de Santander, when they were reportedly taken by armed men identified as ELN members. Since then there has been no news of their whereabouts.

Amnesty International expresses its solidarity with the families of the four defenders being held and calls on the authorities to take, with the agreement of the defenders' relatives, the necessary measures to ensure their immediate release and the protection of their lives and personal safety.

Amnesty International condemns hostage-taking and the unlawful holding of individuals. Hostage-taking is a serious breach of international humanitarian law. We are calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the four defenders and any other civilians being held by the parties to the Colombian armed conflict. Defending human rights is a legitimate activity that must be protected and respected.

The State has a responsibility to respect, protect and ensure the effective enjoyment of the right to defend human rights, and all groups and individuals must respect such work, as established in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the United Nations in 1998.

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