

URGENT ACTION

DEMAND PROTECTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER

William Cristancho Duarte, a human rights lawyer, was threatened in north Colombia on the day of a preliminary hearing regarding the extrajudicial execution of two peasant farmers, who had initially been presented as guerrillas killed in combat, during a military operation. William Cristancho Duarte's life and the life of a witness are in danger.



William Cristancho Duarte, a human rights lawyer from *Corporación Compromiso* was working on the cases of the extrajudicial executions of Julio César Cardozo Quiñónez and José del Carmen Barbosa Patiño, two local peasant farmers who had been killed during a military operation of the Battalion of Engineers Francisco José de Caldas (*Batallón de Ingenieros Francisco José de Caldas*) on 19 October 2007 in the area of Chucuri-San Isidoro, Piedecuesta Municipality, Santander Department. The two men had worked with William Cristancho Duarte, who occasionally provided protection and transport. Both men were initially presented as guerrillas killed in combat.

On 26 October, William Cristancho was threatened soon after attending a hearing with local judicial officials in Piedecuesta Municipality to discuss the case and the possible detention of members of the Battalion of Engineers Francisco José de Caldas for their participation in the killings. A witness to the killings was also threatened. The preliminary hearing was rescheduled to 18 November.

Several people observed and followed William Cristancho as he made his way to the hearing. After the meeting he received a call on his mobile; a man said "What are you doing son-of-a-bitch lawyer, enemy of the army?" (*Qué hace abogado hijueputa enemigo del ejercito?*). Some five minutes later, after leaving the building, about two blocks from the main square, a man approached William Cristancho and said "Make way son-of-a-bitch defender of guerrillas we are watching you closely" (*Abrase hijueputa defensor de guerrilleros lo tenemos en la mira*).

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the security situation of William Cristancho Duarte and the witness, calling on the authorities to ensure protection measures for William Cristancho Duarte and the witness as agreed with them
- Urging the authorities to fully and impartially investigate the threats against those threatened and prosecute those responsible
- Demanding commitment for the authorities to take decisive action to end extrajudicial executions and guarantee the protection of those campaigning for justice in line with repeated United Nations human rights recommendations
- Reminding the authorities to fulfil their obligations to ensure human rights defenders can carry out their work without fear, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 NOVEMBER 2010 TO:

Señor Presidente Juan Manuel Santos

Presidente de la República,
Palacio de Naríño,
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:

Corporación Compromiso
Avenida González Valencia No 58-20
Bucaramanga
Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

William Cristancho Duarte has been providing legal advice and representation for victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, especially for the families of victims of extrajudicial executions carried out by members of the armed forces and then presented as "guerrillas killed in combat". Among the cases he has been working on are the extrajudicial executions of Heriberto Portilla Maldonado and Orlando Maldonado Arias, who were extrajudicially executed and then presented as guerrillas killed in combat on 11 June 2002 in California Municipality in Santander Department. Orlando Maldonado Arias was killed in front of his wife and six children who were minors. He is also working on the case of the extrajudicial execution of the two brothers Teodolindo and Ovidio Murcia Ballén. Paramilitaries reportedly handed the brothers over to the Reyes Prieto Battalion on 10 April 2008 in Tagual, Landázuri Municipality. Santander Department. The brothers were later killed by the army.

During the armed conflict in Colombia, which has lasted over four decades, extrajudicial executions have been carried out by the security forces in a widespread and systematic manner. They are part of the terror tactics used by the security forces as part of their counter-insurgency strategy. The Attorney General's Office is investigating more than 2,000 cases of extrajudicial executions reportedly committed by the security forces. Repeatedly those campaigning for justice in cases of extrajudicial executions have been subject to death threats or have been killed by members of the security forces or paramilitaries working with them.

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