

URGENT ACTION

COLOMBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER AT RISK

Female human rights defender **Ingrid Vergara** has received death threats and her daughter, 14-year-old **Cendy Torres Vergara**, has been followed by unknown individuals in the city of **Sincelejo**, northern Colombia. **Ingrid Vergara** documents and exposes human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups. Her life and that of her daughter may be at risk.



Ingrid Vergara © Private

On 26 October at around 1.15pm **Cendy Torres** noticed a white car with tinted windows and without licence plates following her while she was walking to school in Sincelejo. The car slowed down and two children who were walking past went up to it. The children then approached Cendy Torres and told her: "They want you to let your mom know that she must shut up if she wants to reach the new year" (*te mandan decir que le digas a tu mama que se quede callada si quiere llegar a año nuevo*). The car then drove away.

Cendy Torres had noticed the same car following her on the afternoon of 19 October, the morning of 20 October and the afternoon of 21 October. On 21 October, neighbours told **Ingrid Vergara** that a white pick-up truck with tinted windows had driven past her house several times. The vehicle slowed down every time it passed her house.

Ingrid Vergara is a member of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado, MOVICE), a coalition of civil society organizations campaigning for truth, justice and reparation for the victims of human rights violations committed during Colombia's long-running armed conflict. Ingrid Vergara is one of the leaders of MOVICE in Sucre department, northern Colombia, and has drawn public attention to enforced disappearances and killings committed by paramilitary forces.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- ✓ Expressing concern for the safety of Ingrid Vergara and Cendy Torres and urging the authorities to guarantee their safety in strict accordance with their wishes;
- ✓ Calling on the authorities to carry out a full and impartial investigation into these and previous death threats against Ingrid Vergara and Cendy Torres, to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- ✓ Reminding the authorities to adhere to 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 21 DECEMBER 2009 TO:

Vice-President of the Republic

Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón
Vicepresidencia de la República
Carrera 8A No 7-27
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 565 7682 (ask: "me da tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Dear Mr Vice-president/Estimado Sr. Vicepresidente

Acting Attorney General

Dr. Guillermo Mendoza Diago
Fiscal General de la Nación (e)
Fiscalía General de la Nación
Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán
No. 52-01) Bloque C
Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia
Fax: +57 1 414 9108

Salutation: Dear Attorney

General/Estimado Sr. Fiscal General

And copies to:

National Human Rights Organization
Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz
Calle 61A No 17-26
Bogotá, 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.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 2 April 2008, Cendy Torres was approached outside her school by four unknown men who threatened: “we are going to kill you because of what your mother is doing” (*te vamos a matar por lo que tu madre está haciendo*). Ingrid Vergara has suffered a number of death threats and acts of intimidation before. The latest one was an anonymous email that she received on 2 July 2009, inviting her to her own funeral and referring to her as a guerrilla. Although some protection measures have been agreed, the authorities have not fully implemented them. No-one has been brought to justice for any of these threats.

During Colombia’s 40-year-old armed conflict, members of human rights organizations, trade unions and other social organizations have often been labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and paramilitaries. As a result they often suffer threats, enforced disappearance or killings. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders they consider to be siding with the enemy.

In September 2009, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya, visited Colombia and concluded that “patterns of harassment and persecution against human rights defenders, and often their families, continue to exist in Colombia... I am in particular deeply concerned about the widespread phenomenon of threats from unknown authors against human rights defenders and their families”. She also expressed her “serious concern about the arbitrary arrests and detention (sometimes on a massive scale) of human rights defenders, as well as unfounded criminal proceedings brought against them.”

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