

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/Death threats

COLOMBIA

Members of human rights organizations and trade unions working in the city of Bucaramanga, Santander Department

Paramilitaries have threatened to kill members of seven human rights organizations and trade unions working in the city of Bucaramanga, in the northern Department of Santander.

On 27 January, a written death threat was delivered by courier to the Bucaramanga office of women's human rights organization the Popular Women's Organization (*Organización Femenina Popular* OFP). The threat, signed by the paramilitary group Bucaramanga Metropolitan Bloc of the New Generation of Black Eagles (*El Bloque Metropolitano de Bucaramanga Nueva Generación Aguilas Negras*), named seven human rights organizations and trade unions working in Bucaramanga: Asapaz, Guayacan, the OFP, the Association of the families of the detained-disappeared (*Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos*, ASFADDES), the oil workers' union (*Unión Sindical Obrera de la Industria del Petroleo*, USO), the Committee of Solidarity for Political Prisoners (*Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos*, CSPP) and the Trade Union Congress (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT) and said, "sons of bitches we are going to kill you" (*hijueputas (sic) los vamos a matar*).

The same threat was sent by email to CSPP's office on 28 January, and on 2 February ASFADDES received an envelope containing the same threat at their Bucaramanga office.

The threat claimed to be "a posthumous message to those who encourage the commemoration of the cleansing carried out by the [paramilitary umbrella organization] AUC in Barrancabermeja....[if you] carry on doing stupid things you will have the same future." (*un mensaje postumo a los que promovieron la conmemoración de la limpieza hechas por las AUC en Barrancabermeja.....sigan haciendo acticos guevones (sic) que tendran el mismo futuro.*)

The seven organizations named in the threat had taken part in a vigil on 23 January commemorating the Barrancabermeja massacre, in which around 30 civilians lost their lives at the hands of paramilitaries in May 1998. The vigil was held in Barrancabermeja on the spot where the massacre had taken place. During the vigil, the organizations called for political action to provide truth, justice and reparation to the relatives of the victims. On the same day, the remains of five of the victims, which had been exhumed from mass graves, were handed over to their relatives in the city of Bucaramanga.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During Colombia's 40-year armed conflict, the security forces and paramilitary groups have frequently labelled human rights organizations and trade unions as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, and have gone on to threaten, abduct or kill them. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders and trade unionists they consider to be siding with their enemies.

Colombia's paramilitary groups have supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003, but the threats against human rights organizations and trade unions in Bucaramanga and other parts of the department of Santander show that paramilitaries are still operating there.

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

- calling on the authorities to take effective action to protect members of human rights organizations and trade unions working in Bucaramanga, who have received death threats signed by a paramilitary group;
- calling on them to order full and impartial investigations into the threats, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.
- calling on the authorities to produce policy and plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders, to guarantee their safety according to the principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and to make these plans public.

APPEALS TO:

President

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 337 5890

Salutation: Dear President Uribe/Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe

Vice-President

Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón

Vicepresidencia, Carrera 8A No 7-27, Bogotá, Colombia

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

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

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C, Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Dear Mr Iguarán/Estimado Sr. Fiscal

COPIES TO:

Asfaddes

Carrera 15 N36- 18

Oficina 404

Bucaramanga, Colombia

OFP

Carrera 18 36-24

Oficina 201

Bucaramanga, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 April 2009.