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[Action title]

Activistas Colombianos: Atacados y desacreditados sistemáticamente

[Action extract: for www.amnesty.org homepage]

Los defensores y defensoras de los derechos humanos en Colombia se enfrentan a una campaña sistemática de ataques, y el presidente Uribe y su gobierno han desacreditado públicamente su trabajo.

Actúa para que terminen los abusos de derechos humanos contra los activistas.

[Action text]

Defensores de los derechos humanos como **Hermes Vallejo, Teresa Yarce y Orlando Valencia** (véase izquierda) promueven y protegen pacíficamente los derechos humanos para todas las personas.

En Colombia, los activistas de derechos humanos trabajan en condiciones extremadamente adversas – tratando de proteger los derechos humanos en un país que sufre un conflicto armado interno; y luchando contra una campaña sistemática para **desacreditar** su trabajo.

Al tachar en público a los activistas de derechos humanos de "**subversivos**", el presidente Álvaro Uribe y su gobierno han menoscabado el trabajo de defensoras y defensores, perpetuando en consecuencia los abusos que contra los derechos humanos se cometen en Colombia. Uribe los ha llamado "**defensores del terrorismo**" – acusando a los activistas de ser terroristas que se esconden tras una agenda de derechos humanos. Las fuerzas de seguridad, los paramilitares y, en ocasiones, la guerrilla, atacan a los activistas, aprovechándose del hecho de que el trabajo en favor de los derechos humanos está oficialmente desacreditado.

Los casos de Hermes, Teresa y Orlando ilustran la realidad de los activistas que por medios pacíficos protegen los derechos humanos, ajenos a todo lo que tenga que ver con el terrorismo.

Muchos activistas son objeto de **amenazas, agresiones y persecución judicial** por cargos sin fundamento. Y a los atacantes rara vez se los hace comparecer ante la justicia. El propósito de estas agresiones contra defensores y defensoras de los derechos humanos es **amordazar** su trabajo de denuncia de los abusos que se cometen contra los derechos humanos y de los vínculos existentes entre grupos paramilitares y el ejército.

Las amenazas que algunos activistas reciben son tan frecuentes, que las consideran parte cotidiana de su trabajo. Otros sin embargo han tenido que abandonar sus comunidades... a muchos los han matado.

La presión nacional e internacional ejercida sobre el gobierno colombiano a dado lugar a que se desarrollen programas orientados a la **protección de activistas**, sindicalistas y periodistas. Lamentablemente, los métodos prácticos de protección no son más que medidas limitadas que atajan los síntomas, no las acausas por las que se producen los ataques contra los activistas de derechos humanos.

El Estado colombiano tiene la **obligación** de crear las condiciones básicas para que quienes hacen campaña a favor de los derechos humanos puedan trabajar con libertad. El **presidente tiene que reconocer públicamente** la legitimidad del trabajo que se hace en favor de los derechos humanos y **acabar con la impunidad** para los abusos de derechos humanos cometidos contra los activistas.

[Call to action]

Call on President Uribe to commit publicly to supporting the legitimate activities of human rights activists and end abuses against them. Do this by writing to the Colombian Ambassador in your country.

[Sample letter]

Dear Ambassador / President,

I urge you to [call on President Uribe to]:

Publicly recognize the legitimacy of human rights activists;

Ensure that those responsible for human rights violations are brought to justice;

Prevent the use of unfounded criminal charges against human rights activists.

Yours sincerely,

[Target contact details]

Write to the Colombian Ambassador in your country

Ambassadors' contact details (Click on this link to find contact details)

[\[http://www.thedailyjournalonline.com/article.asp?ArticleId=197920&CategoryId=13305\]](http://www.thedailyjournalonline.com/article.asp?ArticleId=197920&CategoryId=13305)

If there is no official Colombian representation in your country, write to a Colombian Ambassador in your region.

[Links]

Click on the images below (pop-up windows)

[Link 1]



Hermes Vallejo - a peasant farmer leader

Colombian activist - Hermes Vallejo Jiménez

A peasant farmer leader and one of the founders of the Association of Medium and Small Farmers of Tolima Department, Hermes Vallejo was detained in Bogotá on 13 August 2003 by the security forces. His arrest was part of a coordinated series of mass arrests.

Hermes was accused of being a member of a guerrilla group and remained in detention for over a year until a court declared the charges against him unfounded and released him on bail.



He had been detained on the basis of statements made by two former alleged guerrilla members. The court examining the case against Hermes Vallejo and several others, established that the informants had been given access to allegations made in intelligence documents. Investigations carried out by the Procurator General uncovered evidence that the two witnesses who testified against Hermes were offered money and support to secure their certificates of reinsertation into civilian life in return for making statements against several individuals.

Fears that he might be attacked by paramilitary groups if he returns to the department of Tolima have forced Hermes to remain internally displaced - far from his home and work.

[\[Link 2\]](#)



Teresa Yarce - with a women's organization working for peace

Colombian activist - Teresa Yarce

Teresa Yarce, an active member of the Women's Association of Las Independencias (AMI), was working with other AMI members to promote human rights: encouraging people to report human rights violations and to campaign against the militarization and increasing paramilitary control over their local neighbourhood. She also exposed cases of corruption by authorities in the local municipality.

Since 2002, Teresa and other AMI members had received repeated death threats. On 12 November 2002, she was detained together with two other AMI members and accused of rebellion. Her detention came only four days after she had participated in a meeting with the municipal government about human rights abuses committed by the security forces and paramilitary groups. She was released after nine days due to lack of evidence and the criminal investigation against her was closed in February 2003.



On 6 October 2004, Teresa was shot dead in a poor district of Medellín. According to witnesses, she was shot by a man who lived in a neighbouring area and was a known member of a paramilitary group.

About three hours after Teresa Yarce was shot, a known paramilitary approached another AMI member who had witnessed the shooting. He told her that the paramilitaries were celebrating and threatened to kill her and another AMI member who had been detained with Teresa in 2002.

[\[Link 3\]](#)



Orlando Valencia - fighting for collective rights of Afro-descendant communities

Colombian activist - Orlando Valencia

Orlando Valencia was one of the leaders of the Afro-descendant communities fighting for their collective rights: demanding land rights; highlighting environmental problems on the African palm plantations; and calling on the Colombian authorities to respect their rights as civilians in the armed conflict.

He publicly campaigned against alleged illegal occupation of collective land for the plantation of African palm by powerful economic sectors with the help of paramilitary groups.

On the 15 October 2005, Orlando was travelling with nine other members of his community, a lawyer from Justice and Peace and an observer from a Canadian organization (Colombia Solidarity and Accompaniment Project), when the group was stopped by the police at approximately 9am. According to witnesses, a vehicle with known paramilitaries was seen closeby.

By 12.30pm all had been released by the police, but Orlando was stopped by two paramilitaries on a motorcycle who ordered him to get onto the vehicle saying "let's go or we'll finish you off here".

On 24 October 2005, the body of Orlando Valencia was found in the León River, shot in the forehead and his wrists had ligature marks.

