



# On the front line

Regional Action Network on Human Rights Defenders

## ISOLATION AND SUPPORT - DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN AMAZONAS

*Catherine Halvey is an Irish woman who has been working for the last 18 years in different areas of Brazil. Since returning two years ago to Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state, she has been working to set up the Centro dos Direitos Humanos, Human Rights Centre.*

*Catherine Halvey talked to Amnesty International about some of her experiences working as a human rights defender in such a remote area.*

“In setting up the Centro dos Direitos Humanos we are trying to educate people in human rights because we think that a perception and commitment to human rights should be a much deeper part of the fabric of modern society. Unless we educate people in human rights commitment, there is little hope. So one of the projects of the centre is to set up

human rights officers in the different neighbourhoods in Manaus. More than half of the population of the Amazonas now live in the city. Many of them are illiterate. There is 80% unemployment in Compensa where I work, which means that people have nothing to do and they often become involved with those who control the drug dealing, gang violence, car stealing etc. This is a gigantic problem. Every month we have sessions with people from different neighbourhoods. These people will help us put together a more realistic picture of what the human rights violations in the city are and we hope that these human rights officers will bring a sense of justice into people’s lives and human relationships. This is the best way forward; the development of a human rights centre that it is part of the fabric of society in educating society towards a human rights culture.

“We are also setting up solidarity circles for the mothers who have lost sons to the violence, be it police or gang related, where they can share notes and grieve and feel that, at last, there is some space in society that acknowledges their suffering and helps them to overcome it.

“Another of our projects is to set up a data base. In this great silence there is no history, no word about how people have suffered, about who suffers from the violence, about whether there is a repetitive pattern. Nothing has been written, no one talks about it. That is one of the main things that perpetuates the violence. So we have

to set up the data base and that means getting computers, training people and seeking out the information.

“When we talk about violence in Manaus we are not talking about idealists taking up arms and fighting for some political cause. It is not related to one or another particular political group. It is really thuggery and criminals that use this sort of social break down to carry out their illegal violent activities.

“The greatest violence that we are facing right now is related to gangs, called *gallieras*. They operate in Compensa and the shanty town districts. These *gallieras* are young boys who will go wild at weekends and kill people. Very often they are attached to corrupt police officers. They do the dirty work for the police

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*Catherine Halvey of the Human Rights Centre, Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil*

officers. They inform on where drugs are, where arms are and they act as messengers. They work for the corrupt policemen, but when it comes to taking responsibility, the *gallieras* are blamed for everything and no one sees the real culprit.

**“...We need a security force to defend the people, not to terrorize them...”**

“We are working on the case of Jacó Lopes Pereira, a 19 year old student who was assassinated in Manaus in July last year. The main witnesses say that members of the local military police were involved in his killing. All those involved in the case have been intimidated. My guard-dog was poisoned. I bought a second dog and it was also poisoned immediately afterwards. The third was also poisoned. I received threatening telephone calls which subsided when they were reported to the police. Then I just stopped answering my phone. There were often people sitting in cars outside our houses, watching our movements. These cars would also be parked outside the houses of the principal witnesses. The families were terrified and did not want to go ahead with the case any more.

“At the second hearing of the case of Jacó, the policeman in charge told me that we could not take photos and we could not publish anything and the only person that was allowed to speak to the media was one of their own men. So we have a long way to go to be able to carry out our work properly.

“Our official contacts with the police are cordial. There are some good people there and we should try and work with them. Bit by bit we need to create liaison with them and develop our work. They have to put their house in order. We need a security force to defend the people, not to

terrorize them. I think human rights groups have to help them to create that. Who else will do it?

**“...The Centro dos Direitos Humanos is trying to make good the promise made by Brazil to the rest of the world...”**

“Brazil has committed itself before the rest of the world to have human rights councils in every state. Amazonas has none. For the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we pushed for a study of human rights and local problems. The state promised us that everything was in order to set up a human rights councils. Yet absolutely nothing has happened. We really need to publicize this shortcoming. The Centro dos Direitos Humanos is trying to make good the promise made by Brazil to the rest of the world.

“We are very isolated in Amazonas. We have had to start from scratch and build up a network of support. We need to make the central Government in Brasilia interested and also feel responsible for what is going on. We have no support from Brasilia right now, no contact.

“In Amazonas there are no offices of international human rights organizations. We hope that international organizations will, at some point, consider what can be done with the Amazonas region. Not just Brazilian Amazonas, but Peruvian and Colombian Amazonas as well. The problems are very similar. We want human rights organizations to think of doing something in the Amazonas as a region.

“What really worried the people behind Jacó’s murder, was that we were denouncing it to Amnesty International and to Human Rights Watch. They were furious. They

called me a bitch, a witch and other things over the phone. They did it because I said publicly that we were campaigning for support for human rights even at a local level. We are not scared to expose the atrocities that are being committed here. We think that is one of our main strengths. We are still just beginning. We have only been functioning for two years and so far the response from the international community is good. We hope to strengthen it. We hope the international community will help defend us so we can continue our work despite the harassment.”

**INTERNATIONAL**

## ACCOMPANIMENT: A FORM OF PROTECTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The concept of an international presence as a deterrent to human rights violations is one that is based both on political analysis and practical experience. The last two decades have seen an increase in the number of international treaties and agreements on human rights signed by Latin American governments, at the same time there has been a rise in the number of international non-governmental organizations using their presence as a deterrent to offer an element of protection to people at risk of political violence. When state agents who violate human rights are bound by international agreements, the presence of human rights observers can effectively help to dissuade aggressors from carrying out attacks on those who promote issues of human rights and social justice. Whereas Amnesty International protects the rights of political prisoners by exerting pressure with an onslaught of letters, accompaniment manifests similar pressure more immediately, with individuals risking their lives to stand beside human rights activists - to prevent arrest or attack.

This apparent power to dissuade human rights violations is rooted in a series of complex factors.

The accompaniment individual is literally an embodiment of

international human rights concern, a compelling and visible reminder to those using violence that it will not go unnoticed. The premise of accompaniment is that there will be an international response to whatever abuse the person witnesses. Behind such a response lies the implied threat of diplomatic, political and economic pressure. The sponsors of such violence, wishing to avoid such pressure, may therefore change their behaviour accordingly.

The perceptions and interests of a wide range of key actors in each scenario are crucial to understanding why accompaniment can protect lives. If the aggressor is unaware of the accompaniment person's presence at the scene of events, i.e. the person is

### *A PBI volunteer accompanies Rafael Barrios of the Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo', Lawyers Collective 'José Alvear Restrepo' in Bogotá, Colombia*

not clearly visible, virtually no impact has been made by the companion. A similar effect occurs, if the aggressor is not aware that the accompanying person is a representative of an international recognized organization, or if the aggressor fails to understand the significance of such organizations.

Accompaniment is most effective in circumstances where the aggressor is sensitive to diplomatic, political or economic pressures. This implies that

the aggressor must be part of the state apparatus, i.e. a member of the security forces, or must have a relation with the state authorities. By implication the weaker the link of the aggressor with the state, the less effective accompaniment is at protecting against human rights violations. This is one reason why accompaniment does not necessarily work in every context.

In turn, those carrying out accompaniment must have the capacity to generate the degree of pressure required to ensure its presence constitutes a dissuasive force. For instance, it has long been recognized that the presence of aid workers in communities in conflict zones has deterred incursions, usually by the state's armed forces, against the community because of the international nature of the organization represented by the foreigners. It is significant that the Xamán massacre in Guatemala on 5 October 1995, in which eleven people were shot dead by soldiers, occurred precisely on a day when no aid worker was visiting the community, although the community was accustomed to constant international presence.

Accompaniment by international observers is, in short, an expression of concern by the international community for the situation which the country is living or in terms of a specific conflict.

### **The work of Peace Brigades International (PBI)**

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) which has used and developed international accompaniment in several areas of conflict around the world, including Sri Lanka, El Salvador and Guatemala, to protect activists who are targeted on account of their work to promote human rights and social justice.

Since 1994 PBI has maintained a team of international observers in Colombia in Bogotá, in Barrancabermeja in the Magdalena Medio and in the north-eastern region of Urabá. PBI aims to create a protective network around members of human rights organizations who have requested their accompaniment because of the risks they face from members of paramilitary groups or the security forces<sup>1</sup>. The effectiveness of this protective network depends partly on PBI's ability to raise awareness about its role in protecting human rights and international human rights monitoring. For this reason PBI maintains a constant dialogue with both civilian and military authorities at a national and regional level, with Colombian NGOs, the Church, the United Nations and other international organizations working in Colombia. At an international level PBI is supported by a wide spectrum of institutions, NGOs, politicians, diplomats and parliamentarians who, when the need arises, express their support for PBI's work to the Colombian authorities. This dialogue with interested parties is supported by the production and distribution of information in which PBI describes and analyses its observation work.

PBI volunteers undergo an intensive training course before joining the PBI-Colombia Project. Once on the team they provide a presence in the offices

of human rights organizations and accompany human rights defenders on their journeys to other regions of Colombia, or to public events and occasionally, at times of increased threat, in their homes.

### **Anew international presence in Medellín**

Medellín is Colombia's second city, capital of the department of Antioquia and one of the most important social and political centres of the country. The previously robust community of human rights defenders in Medellín has received heavy blows in recent years. For instance, in 1998 the human rights lawyer Jesús María Valle Jaramillo was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in his office in Medellín after denouncing links between members of the Colombian military and paramilitary organizations; early this year two members of the Medellín branch of the *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos*, Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners were killed; a prominent university professor,

was also killed; in February, four members of the *Instituto Popular de Capacitación* (IPC), Popular Training Institute, were kidnapped by an armed group. The *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, claimed responsibility for the abductions and later released the human rights defenders following an international outcry. In such hostile conditions many human rights NGOs in Medellín have reduced the profile of their work in order to avoid being targeted for attack, others have stop their work or left the country.

To assist Colombian human rights defenders in Medellín in continuing their work, the PBI-Colombia Project will be setting up a new sub-team of four volunteers in Medellín by the end of 1999. PBI will accompany organizations like the IPC and the *Asociación de Familiares de los Detenidos y Desaparecidos* ASFADDES, Association of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared.

*The offices of the Instituto Popular de Capacitación, Popular Training Institute, Medellín, Colombia after a bomb attack on 29 August 1999.*

<sup>1</sup>In the last two years more than 25 Colombian human rights activists have been killed

Hernan Henao Delgado, who had been researching on human rights at the Antioquia University in Medellín

## International Political Mission of Support for human rights defenders in Colombia

*The following are extracts from the public report of the International Political Mission of Support for Human Rights Defenders in Colombia which visited the country in August 1999.*

“The coordination of NGO for human rights in Colombia (Colombia-Europe-United States) and the Ad Hoc non-governmental Committee for Action and Protection for Human Rights Defenders, took the initiative of commissioning a group of experts on human rights to carry out a study of the series of attacks and harassment being suffered by the organizations and personnel who defend human rights in Colombia. (...)

The members of the Mission were: Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, founding lawyer of the Robert F. Kennedy Centre for Human Rights, Washington; Marvin Frankel, lawyer and ex-federal judge of the United States, ex-president of the Executive Board of Human Rights Lawyers, of New York; Baltazar Garzón, judge of the Spanish National Court of Justice, awarded national prize for human rights, 1990; Father Luis Pérez Aguirre, Director of Servicio de Paz y Justicia (Service for Peace and Justice), Uruguay; Frank Larue, Director of the Centre for Legal Action in Human Rights, Guatemala; Frank Soberón, Vice-President of the International Federation for Human Rights delegate from the Observatory for the Protection of the Defenders of Human Rights (FIDH - OMCT), headquarters in Geneva; Margaret Popkin, Director of Functions of the Robert F. Kennedy Centre for Human

Rights, and member of the Technical Mission for Support for Defenders of Human Rights, Colombia.

The mission witnessed with deep concern the serious frequency of attacks and threats against defenders of human rights in Colombia. During the last two years, nearly 30 have been murdered; one has been ‘disappeared’, four have been kidnapped and later released, four more have allegedly been detained, about 70 have been victims of threats and active harassment, at least 27 have been forced into exile to save their lives. In addition, several offices of Trade Unions and human rights organizations have suffered bomb attacks which have destroyed their buildings. (...)

\* Concerning some of the massacres about which we have received information, especially those recently committed in La Gabarra, Catatumbo Region, we have learnt that non-governmental organizations warned the public authorities of the presence of paramilitaries and the risk that they might attack the local inhabitants, as did eventually occur. As a result of this warning, representatives of these NGO have been attacked by a sector of the army in an intolerable manner, attempting to associate them with the guerrilla forces and going as far as to talk of a “legal and written war”, thus exposing them to serious dangers.

\* We insist on the need to eradicate the illegal activities at the centre of the public authorities which, by either action or omission, permit such misconduct.

\* (...) We ask that a serious, impartial and effective penal investigation be set up of the violations committed against personnel, organizations and institutions which defend human rights, and that sanctions be applied against the physical and intellectual

perpetrators of the violations.

\* We support the demand of the defenders of human rights (as we have made known to the authorities) that the files of the intelligence service containing their records and those of people connected to them, should be made known to them, and, where applicable, be corrected, explained or erased.

\* We consider very positive the Presidential Directive 07 of September 9<sup>th</sup> 1999, although we expressly ask that it be translated into specific, concrete action leading to an effective guarantee and protection of those rights and the corresponding sanctions against the violations against them. (...)

\* We consider that it is imperative that the protection and security of human rights defenders be fully guaranteed by the State. In this context we ask the Ministry of the Interior to adopt all necessary steps to ensure this and to overcome the obstacles which have hitherto prevented it.

\* We ask that the opportunity for dialogue between the NGO, protectors of human rights and the armed forces be reopened, and that the latter should admit to their internal malfunctioning which has led to the violation of fundamental human rights at their core. (...)

\* Finally, (...) we urge the public authorities to carry out the agreements reached with the NGOs on February 16<sup>th</sup> 1999, as well as to follow the many recommendations which resulted from the intergovernmental and international community initiatives concerning the protection of human rights defenders.”

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia,  
23 September 1999

## Violations of the rights of human rights defenders in all countries

### The UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

Guided by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all the international human rights instruments,

(...) Welcoming the adoption of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by the General Assembly on 9 December 1998,

Recalling that the Declaration states that each State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually or in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action, and that individuals, groups, institutions and non-governmental organizations have an important role to play and a responsibility in safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and contributing to the promotion and advancement of democratic societies, institutions and processes,

(...) Recalling also its resolution 1995/25 of 24 August 1995 on the protection by competent authorities of everyone against threats, retaliation, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of the legitimate, peaceful and non-violent exercise of the right to strive for the protection of human rights,

Noting with deep concern that, in many countries, in contradiction of the commitments and obligations of Governments, persons and organizations engaged in promoting and defending human rights are facing threats, harassment and insecurity,

Deeply concerned at the increasing number of cases of which it has been informed concerning human rights defenders who, because of their activities in favour of the recognition, promotion and defence of human rights, have been persecuted, either by being arrested, convicted or imprisoned, or by becoming the victims of unresolved killings, or by being suspended or prohibited from exercising their professional activities, or through threat of suppression or actual suppression of the legal personality of the organization to which they belong,

1. Urges each State to take any measures necessary within its jurisdiction to ensure the effective respect of its obligations in the field of human rights, in accordance with the provisions of various international instruments, including the Declaration, and to guarantee to individuals, groups, associations, organizations and organs of society the necessary conditions to exercise fully their activities in favour of the recognition, promotion and defence of human rights;

2. Urges each State to take any measures necessary within its own jurisdiction to ensure the security of all persons covered by the Declaration who are being repressed, harassed or threatened anywhere in the world;

3. Strongly condemns the murders of the following persons, by whomsoever committed, and calls upon the Governments concerned to carry out thorough investigations to identify the perpetrators and to bring them to justice:

Jaime Garzón, journalist and humanitarian activist, on 13 August 1999 in Bogota, Colombia;

Everardo de Jesus Puerta and Julio Ernesto Gonzalez, members of the Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, on 31 January 1999 in the suburbs of San Luis, Colombia;

Ingrid Washinawakatok, Lahe'ena Gay and Terence Freitas, human rights activists, seized by armed men of the guerrilla movement Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia in Colombia on 25 February 1999 and found murdered on 4 March over the border in Venezuela;

Saul Filormo Canar Pauta, Secretary and executive member of the cooperative movement Confederación Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones Clasistas Unitarias de Trabajadores, kidnapped on 26 November 1998 in Quito and found murdered on 3 December 1998 in Latacunga, Ecuador;

Rolando Duarte and José Alfredo Chacon Ramirez, in 1998, both members of the Workers Syndicate of the municipality of Zacapa, Guatemala; (...)

4. Calls upon the Governments concerned to ensure that crimes committed against human rights defenders do not go unpunished, to allow and facilitate all necessary inquiry and to ensure judgement by a civil tribunal and punishment of the perpetrators as well as compensation of the families of the victims, including for killings which occurred a long time ago, as recommended by the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; (...).

(UN Sub-Commission resolution 1999/3, adopted 20 August 1999)

## APPEALS CASES

**Cuba: Fundación Lawton de**

## Derechos Humanos, Lawton Foundation of Human Rights

Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González, who is president of the Fundación Lawton de Derechos Humanos, Lawton Foundation for Human Rights, was arrested along with four other people (who were all released the next day) on 14 August 1999 in a park in Pedro Betancourt, Matanzas province. They had congregated in the park to give a talk on civil resistance. After being arrested, Biscet said to a police officer "Dios te ama", "God loves you". He was then reportedly beaten about the face and neck and his elbow was burned with a cigarette by policemen. They only stopped when other detainees objected by shouting.

Biscet was then put in a single cell and forced to strip naked and beaten again. He was then put in a windowless cell and kicked in the ankles. He was later transferred to the Departamento Técnico de Investigaciones (DTI), Technical Investigations Department, in Havana, where he claims he was psychologically tortured by being repeatedly interrogated and being threatened with imprisonment if he organised any other dissident activity. He was released on 16 August 1999.

Oscar Biscet has recently featured prominently in several activities which were critical of the government's policies, and have been arrested several times during the last 12 months. In July 1999 Oscar Biscet took part in a hunger strike organised by a group of dissidents in Havana known as the Ayunantes de Tamarindo 34, Tamarindo 34 Hunger-strikers. The 40-day hunger strike began on 7 June to demand the release of all political prisoners and respect for human rights in Cuba. During the fast Oscar Biscet also organised a conference about political prisoners. Oscar Biscet was detained for short periods in July, September,

November and December 1998 and in January and February 1999.

### Recommended Action:

Write to authorities and request:

- & that an independent and impartial inquiry is held into the allegations that Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet González was subjected to ill-treatment on 14 August 1999.
- & that those responsible be immediately suspended from duty and brought to justice.
- & that police officers be reminded of international standards for the treatment of prisoners and held accountable for their actions at all times.

### Appeals to:

#### Attorney-General

Dr Juan Escalona Reguera  
Fiscal General de la República  
Fiscalía General de la República  
San Rafael 3, La Habana, Cuba  
Telegrams: Fiscal General, Havana, Cuba  
Telexes: 511456 fidge  
Faxes: + 53 7 57 07 95  
Salutation: Sr Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

#### Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr. Felipe Pérez Roque  
Ministero de Relaciones Exteriores  
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores  
Calzada No. 360, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba  
Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba  
Telexes: 511122 / 511464 / 512950  
Faxes: + 53 7 335261 / 33 3085  
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

### **México: harassment of human rights defenders**

On 19 August 1999 three members of

the Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Frey Bartolomé de las Casas' (CDHFBC), a human rights organization based in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas state, were held against their will by a number of supporters of the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), as they were driving to the community of Viejo Velasco, Chiapas state, to investigate the reported arbitrary detention of three people. According to information received the PRI supporters threatened and abused the human rights defenders, telling them they would burn their car if they did not leave within the next half hour. Following their release the defenders questioned the soldiers at the nearby military road block as to why they did not intervene. The soldiers replied '*esta gente es muy violenta y ni a nosotros nos hacen caso*' ('these people are very violent and they don't listen to anyone, including us').

On 9 August 1999 of Digna Ochoa y Plácido, a human rights lawyer working with the Centro de Derechos Humanos "Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez" (PRODH), in Mexico City, was forced into the back of a car by two unknown men and punched in the stomach. She was later released, but was told she would be killed if she drew attention to her situation as she left the car.

On 3 September 1999, PRODH received three letters with the following death threats: "*Reverendo padre aquí está su sentencia de muerte*" ("Reverend Father here is your death sentence"); "*El que sigue es otro, hijos de puta. Así se los cargará su madre a todos*" ("This is another [threat], sons of bitches. This way you are all going to be dead meat"). Attached to the death threat was one of Digna Ochoa's business cards, supposedly stolen when she was abducted. On 8 September 1999, four more letters containing death threats arrived at the offices of

PRODH. Members of the organization have also received threatening phone calls at their homes. On 14 September two white envelopes containing death threats against members of PRODH were found in their offices.

### **Recommended Action:**

Send telegrams, faxes, express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- & expressing concern about the acts of harassment to which human rights defenders from the working with PRODH in Mexico City and CDHFBC in Chiapas state were subjected in August and September 1999;
- & urging the Mexican authorities to carry out a full and independent investigation into these acts of harassment, to make public the results and to bring those responsible to justice;
- & calling for the Mexican authorities to make public their repudiation of all harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders in Mexico and to recognize the legitimate contribution that human rights defenders make to promoting human rights and the rule of law.
- & urging the Mexican government to ensure that the principles and spirit expressed in the 'Declaration on the Right and Responsibility Of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms', adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, are translated into concrete actions and policies aimed at protecting human rights defenders and enabling them to carry out their activities without hindrance.

### **Appeals to:**

#### **President of the Republic**

Lic. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León

Presidente de la República  
Residencia Oficial de los Pinos  
México D.F, MEXICO  
Tel: (+52 5) 515 9829 / 8256  
Fax: (+52 5) 515 5729  
Salutation: Señor Presidente/ Your Excellency

#### **Minister of the Interior**

Sr. Diódoro Carrasco Altamirano  
Secretario de Gobernación  
Secretaría de Gobernación  
Bucareli 99, 1er piso  
Col. Juárez C.P.  
06699 México D.F.  
MEXICO  
Tel: (+52 5) 535 6172 / 592 1141  
Fax: (+52 5) 546 5350  
Salutation: Señor Secretario/ Dear Minister

### **Argentina: Threats against the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association**

The *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* is a women's human rights organisation set up to campaign for their children and relatives, "disappeared" during the years of military government, during which thousands of people were abducted by the security forces and "disappeared".

On 17 September 1999 graffiti was reportedly painted on the organization's headquarters and bookshop, which read: '*Libertad a Massera*', '*Viva Massera*' and '*Viejas putas*' ("Freedom for Massera", "Long live Massera" and "Old Whores"). On 23 September they received a threatening email: "...your children were crazy Jews and worthless terrorists who shouldn't have had the honour of being born in a glorious country like the national Christian fatherland Argentina.". The message also claimed responsibility for the graffiti.

It is also reported that on 27

September, Hebe Bonafini, President of the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, received a number of telephone calls from someone claiming to represent the *Comando Massera*, Massera Command, who threatened to blow up the organization's headquarters.

It is believed that this harassment is related to two court rulings by the Argentine Judiciary in September 1999 against Emilio Massera. Massera was head of the Navy during the military government of 1976 to 1983. On 1 September 1999 the Supreme Court of Argentina ruled that former Admiral Massera should pay \$120,000 in compensation to a victim of human rights violations, for the "disappearance" of his parents, brother, sister and sister-in-law in July 1976. On 9 September 1999 the highest court in Argentina, the Federal Court, confirmed the proceedings against Emilio Massera for seizing and kidnapping babies born in captivity, many of whom were adopted by members of the security forces. Emilio Massera has been under house arrest since November 1998.

### **Recommended Action:**

Please send telegrams/faxes/ express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- & expressing concern about the threats to members of the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and its president, Hebe Bonafini;
- & calling for a prompt, full and impartial investigation into the threats and intimidation, for the results to be made public, and for those responsible to be brought to justice.
- & urging the Argentine government to ensure that the principles and spirit expressed in the 'Declaration on the Right and Responsibility Of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and

Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms', adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, are translated into concrete actions and policies aimed at protecting human rights defenders and enabling them to carry out their activities without hindrance.

#### Appeals to:

##### President

Exmo. Sr. Presidente de la República Argentina

Dr. Carlos Saúl Menem

Casa Rosada, Balcarce 50

Buenos Aires C.F., ARGENTINA

**Telegrams: President Menem, Buenos Aires, Argentina**

**Faxes: +5411 4331 6376 / 4331 1849**

**Salutation: Excelencia / Your Excellency**

##### Minister of Interior

Sr Ministro del Interior

Dr Carlos Corach, Ministerio del Interior

25 de Mayo, 101, 1002 Buenos Aires

C.F., ARGENTINA

**Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Buenos Aires, Argentina**

**Faxes: +5411 4331 1156**

**(if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")**

**Salutation: Sr Ministro / Dear Minister**

## NOTICE BOARD

### Paraguay: NGOs coordinate to defend human rights

On 22 July the *Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos del Paraguay*, CODEHUPY (the Paraguayan Human Rights Coordination) was officially formed. It is made up of 32 institutions including NGOs, civil organizations and trade unions and has the following objectives:

- ' To constitute a forum of exchange of information and develop relations between national and international human rights organizations.
- ' To defend and promote fundamental human rights as enshrined in national and international legal instruments.
- ' To strengthen public awareness about the importance of defending human rights.
- ' To undertake actions, campaigns and publication of reports on the human rights situation in Paraguay.
- ' To support organizations and social movements in their activities to defend human rights and to promote their legitimacy at all levels.
- ' To press for the fulfilment and implementation by the State of national and international human rights obligations.

The main activities that are currently being carried out by the Coordination are: lobby for the nomination of a human rights ombudsman for Paraguay; the publication of the Annual Report on Human Rights in Paraguay; campaigns on the rights of children and adolescents to achieve the approval of the Penal Code on Children and Adolescents in Paraguay; lobby for the ratification of the International Criminal Court by the

government of Paraguay; support of actions of other NGOs and civil organizations in Latin America.

CODEHUPY participated in the lobbying of the Paraguayan government to present and support a resolution on human rights defenders in the Organization of American States (OAS) last June.

This is the first time Paraguayan NGOs have joined forces to coordinate work to promote human rights. The organizations participating in the Coordination work on a variety of human rights issues including the environment, health, conscientious objection, women, indigenous rights, torture, children and the right to freedom of expression.

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### Colombia: President orders cooperation with human rights organizations

On 9 September 1999, Colombia's Human Rights Day, president Andrés Pastrana issued Presidential Directive 07 concerning 'support, communication and cooperation of the Colombian State with human rights organizations'. The directive restates the previous Presidential Directive 011 of June 1997, issued by the then president Ernesto Samper. The Directive orders all public officials to abstain from questioning the legitimacy of human rights organizations and from making false accusations which could compromise their security or reputation. It also requires all public officials to cooperate fully with human rights organizations when asked to provide information or assistance.

Although this declaration is welcome, human rights groups are concerned that under the Samper administration the Directive 011 was never enforced and therefore did not deter military personnel from continuing to make regular unsubstantiated public accusations intended to undermine the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders. Similarly, the new Directive 07 makes no mention of how those who disobey it will be sanctioned. Without the commitment to enforce the Directive rigorously, human rights defenders fear that there is little chance it will have any significant impact.

Human rights groups insist that state officials who disobey the Directive must face immediate public sanction in order to demonstrate that public officials cannot make false accusations with impunity.

### **Peru: Withdrawal from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights**

On 7 July 1999 Peru's Congress voted to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Over the past months the Inter-American Court has determined that the human rights of several persons in Peru had been violated.

Human rights groups believe this withdrawal to be an extremely serious setback for the promotion and protection of human rights in Peru. By refusing to recognize the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court as binding, the Government of Peru has effectively denied human rights abuse victims any redress before an international court of law.

Peru has been a State party to the American Convention on Human Rights since 1978. In 1981 Peru unconditionally accepted that the Inter-American Court should hear matters relating to Peru's fulfilment of the Convention and undertook to comply with the judgment of the Court in any case to which it is a party.

Recourse to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights is vital in Peru. Thousands of cases of human rights violations perpetrated by the security forces between 1980 and 1995 cannot be resolved because judicial investigations within Peru have been blocked by two Amnesty Laws which, in 1995, gave members of the security forces immunity from prosecution. Thousands of prisoners accused of terrorism-related crimes have been denied a fair trial, under procedures which systematically violate international fair trial standards. Human rights groups have repeatedly called on the authorities to repeal the Amnesty Laws, and to bring Peru's anti-terrorism legislation into line with international fair trial standards.

The decision to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court is the latest in a series of measures taken over past years by the two governments of President Alberto Fujimori which have had the effect of undermining the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

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