

Stop violence against women

Murdered for speaking out – persecution of women human rights defenders in Colombia

[photo caption]

Cover photo: Remembering the dead of Colombia's four decades of internal conflict, a member of feminist peace movement Ruta Pacifica (The Peaceful Way), observes a minute's silence, Colombia, 2000. © Paul Smith/Panos Pictures

[end caption]

Women risk their lives to defend human rights in Colombia

Esperanza Amaris Miranda was reportedly abducted from her home by three armed men on 16 October 2003. The men – apparently members of army-backed paramilitary forces – forced her into a taxi and began to drive away. When her 21-year-old daughter clung on to the door of the moving car, the men got out and kicked her to the ground. A few minutes later, Esperanza's body was abandoned in the road. She had been shot dead.

Esperanza was 40 years old and supported her two children by selling lottery tickets in the city of Barrancabermeja, Colombia. She was also a member of the Popular Women's Organization (OFP), which has campaigned for women's rights for more than 30 years.

In Colombia women who speak out for their rights face intimidation, violence and even death from armed groups on both sides of the country's long-running internal conflict. Government security forces and their paramilitary allies have labelled women community leaders, activists and human rights defenders as guerrilla collaborators and legitimate targets in

the counter-insurgency war. Armed opposition groups have killed women they accuse of siding with their enemies. Rape, mutilation and abuse of women and girls have been used as weapons of war to generate fear and to silence campaigns for social, economic and political rights.

[photo caption]

One of the women's centres in Barrancabermeja run by the Popular Women's Organization (OFP), 2003 © AI

[end caption]

Esperanza's abductors reportedly said they were from the Central Bolivar Bloc, a paramilitary group that had previously threatened her. She had reported the threats to the Regional Prosecutor. Yet the police took no effective action to safeguard her and, after her abduction, did not answer OFP's phone calls. More than 90 murders and over 50 "disappearances" in Barrancabermeja in 2003 testify to the impunity enjoyed by the paramilitaries and guerrilla groups.

Esperanza's case is only one of many. Leonora Castaño, president of a group promoting women's land and human rights, the National Association of Peasant Farmer, Black and Indigenous Women of Colombia (ANMUCIC), has been the target of numerous death threats. Blanca Nubia Díaz, an ANMUCIC supporter, was forced to flee her home after her 16-year-old daughter was killed by paramilitaries in May 2001. In September 2003 an anonymous letter to ANMUCIC said that her son had been taken captive.

The Colombian government has failed not only to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders, many of them women, but also to combat or dismantle paramilitary groups. Ignoring repeated recommendations by the international community, the government is now proposing legislation that may allow human rights abusers to elude justice.

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Support our campaign: together we can make a difference

- **Take an interest:**
Find out and monitor how your community, government, police, security forces and courts respond to violence against women and girls.
- **Take a stand:**
Speak out about violence against women. Challenge prejudiced or dismissive attitudes.
- **Take action:**
Join our global campaign for women's right to freedom from violence and discrimination.

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In the home and in the community, in times of war and

peace, millions of women and girls are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity. Join Amnesty International's campaign to demand action by governments, communities and individuals to stop violence against women throughout the world.
[end box]

Support human rights defenders in Colombia

Call on President Uribe to:

- bring to justice those responsible for the killing of Esperanza Amaris Miranda and other human rights abuses against women's rights activists;
- take action to disband army-backed paramilitary groups and to stop the security forces flouting the government's obligations, under international and regional human rights standards, to protect individuals campaigning for women's rights.

When writing to President Uribe, stress that although we recognize that guerrilla groups are responsible for serious breaches of international humanitarian law, this cannot be used by the government as an excuse not to take measures to confront the human rights crisis. Send your appeals to: Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Send messages of solidarity and support for the women's organizations OFP and ANMUCIC to: the Mesa de Trabajo "Mujer y Conflicto Armado", Calle 38, No. 16-45, Bogotá, Colombia

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What you can do

I would like to join the Stop Violence against Women campaign.

Please send me more information.

I would like to join Amnesty International. Please send me details.

I would like to make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.

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Please send your form to the Amnesty International address in the box below, if there is one:

or to Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House,
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or visit Amnesty International's website at
www.amnesty.org/actforwomen
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