

PUBLIC

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UA 294/07 Fear for safety/Death Threats

COLOMBIA Yolanda Becerra Vega (f) President of the *Organización Femenina Popular*, (OFP),
Popular Women's Organization
Members of her family
Other members of OFP

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Yolanda Becerra, president of the *Organización Femenina Popular*, (OFP), Popular Women's Organization, her family and other OFP members following the assault she suffered at her home in the municipality of Barrancabermeja, Santander Department.

At 7.30am on 4 November, when Yolanda Becerra heard a knock on the door of her flat, she opened the door without asking who was there, as two of her colleagues from the OFP had just left and she thought they might have returned. Instead, she was confronted by two hooded armed men who reportedly shoved her against the wall and threatened her with a gun. One of the men said: "son of a bitch, it's over, you have 48 hours to leave otherwise we will put an end to your family and you will not escape" (*hijueputa el cuento se acabó, tiene 48 horas para que se vaya, sino vamos a acabar con su familia y usted no se nos escapa*). The men then searched her home for the next fifteen minutes.

Prior to this on 22 October, Yolanda Becerra, as president of the OFP, sent a letter to the Colombian Vice-President, Francisco Santos reporting a written death threat signed by the Águilas Negras paramilitary group which was received in the OFP's offices on 7 July 2007 against OFP and other human rights defenders working in Barrancabermeja. At the time of writing there is reportedly no information regarding any response from the Colombian authorities to this letter. The recent threat against Yolanda Becerra heightens concern for her safety and that of other human rights defenders in Barrancabermeja.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the context of Colombia's 40-year-old armed conflict human rights organizations are frequently labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. As a result they often suffer enforced "disappearance", killings or torture at the hands of army-backed paramilitary groups, or members of the security forces. Armed opposition groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders they consider to be siding with the enemy.

Colombia's army-backed paramilitary groups have supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process. Despite this, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of threats and human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups operating with the cooperation of the security forces against human rights defenders. It appears that many paramilitary groups have not demobilized at all, but are continuing to operate, often using new names in an attempt to cover up the fact that they have not actually demobilized. Recent public statements by paramilitary organizations have made clear that their structures remain intact.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Yolanda Becerra, her family and other OFP activists following the threats against her and her family on 4 November 2007;

- urging the authorities to take effective action, deemed appropriate by Yolanda Becerra, her family and other OFP members, to protect them and ensure that OFP can continue its legitimate and important work in the defence of human rights in safety;
- calling on the government to carry out full and impartial investigations into this threat and the 7 July 2007 threat to make the findings public and bring all those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to take decisive action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the region and to break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations to human rights defenders, as laid out in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Organization of American States Human Rights Defenders in the Americas resolutions and in repeated recommendations made to them by the UN;

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 342 0592

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

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr. Fernando Araújo Perdomo

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

Calle 10 No 5-51, Palacio de San Carlos, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 562 7822

Salutation: Dear Sir/Sr. Ministro

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: Estimado Sr. Fiscal/Dear Mr Iguarán

COPIES TO:

Organización Femenina Popular,

Cra 22 No 52B – 36, Barrancabermeja,

Santander, 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 18 December 2007.