

Brussels, May 15, 2012

SERIOUS ATTACKS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND PEOPLE STRUGGLING FOR PEACE

In late March we reported on the worsening of attacks against human rights defenders in Colombiaⁱ. Unfortunately, since March this trend has been confirmed. Recent weeks have been marked by assassinations and forced disappearances of people struggling for peace and respect for human rights. **In the first three months of 2012, thirteen human rights defenders were killed; that is one each week**ⁱⁱ.

Human rights defenders and people participating in the Patriotic March (*Marcha Patriótica*) which took place on April 21, 22 and 23, 2012, promoted by a wide range of social sectors in search of peace and a political solution to the conflict, have been the target of serious threats and attacks.

- **On May 9, 2012 it was reported that a sophisticated plan, involving more than one billion pesos, had been hatched to kill Piedad Cordoba, spokeswoman for the Colombians for Peace movement (*Colombianas y Colombianos por la Paz - CCP*)ⁱⁱⁱ.** The CCP reported that "a number of former members of the military, who have participated in such operations against political leaders who have been assassinated, have acquired the latest technology for accuracy and precision in their objective."

According to the CCP "The plan to kill Piedad Cordoba is evidence of continued criminal structures that seek to obstruct peace building based on justice."

- **On May 7, 2012 the self-named paramilitary group Black Eagles - Capital Bloc (*Aguilas Negras - Bloque Capital*) threatened to kill** leaders from the following organisations: FENSUAGRO, ASOCAMNDES, CONAP, CND, ANDESCOL, REINICIAR, FUNHASCOL, MANE, ANDAS, MESA NACIONAL, CASA DE AMISTAD CON VENEZUELA, FEDERACION NACIONAL SINDICAL NUEVO LIDERAZGO CAMPESINO, and stated that they would 'eliminate' the Patriotic March "as in previous years." It is noteworthy that according to this communiqué they declare the organisations military targets because they are "inciting communities to demand their alleged rights to claiming lands and other benefits for supposedly being displaced or victims of the State, taking advantage of the tremendous political will of our President Santos, and opposing the well-deserved military jurisdiction of the heroes of our country".



- **On April 27, 2012 Mr. Hernan Henry Diaz, Vice President of the Small Farmers' Association of South East Putumayo (*Asociación Campesina del Sur Oriente del Putumayo - ACSOMAYO*) was reported as having disappeared.**

Mr. Diaz was last seen on April 18, 2012, in the village of Puerto Vega, an oil exploration area with a high-level permanent presence of the military since 2002. Mr. Diaz was going to support the participation of a delegation of more than 200 peasants and indigenous peoples from the municipality of Valle del Guamuez, department of Putumayo, in a national event to launch the Patriotic March.

Mr. Diaz is a delegate of the Departmental Office for Social Organisations in Putumayo for the protection of human rights defenders. His name was included in the list of leaders and human rights defenders from Putumayo who are at risk for their work and for whom protection was sought. This list was delivered to the Vice Minister of the Interior and Justice in early and mid-2011 as part of the National Working Group on Guarantees for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (*Mesa Nacional de Garantías*), however to date there has been almost no progress regarding these protection measures.

- **On April 21, 2012 Mrs. Maria Ruth Sanabria, president of the Arauca branch of the Standing Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (*Comité Permanente para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos – CPDH*) received death threats signed by the self-named paramilitary group Centaurs Bloc AUC (*Bloque Centauros AUC*). Between 16 and 17 April this year the Vice President of the CPDH Arauca branch, Edinson Palomino, received similar threats^{iv}. The threats included smears against the *Polo Democrático* political party, alleging that they are a front for the FARC-EP and invited the defenders to a non-existent meeting. These threats occurred during the launch of the National Council of the Patriotic March movement.**
- **Also reported disappeared since April 20, 2012, is Ms. Martha Cecilia Guevara Oyola, community leader from San Vicente del Caguán, who was part of the Patriotic March political movement^v.**

On several occasions the authorities have smeared or questioned the Patriotic March, including the President himself who asked the movement to clarify possible links with the FARC^{vi}, thereby increasing the danger for those involved in the movement.

Threats and attacks also continue against others who work for the defence of human rights.

- **El On May 8, 2012 unknown persons fired on the office of Ms. Mónica Roa, Latin American director of the NGO Women's Link Worldwide, a human rights defender well known for her work on the issue of abortion. The shot was fired with gas-powered pellet guns which were so powerful they penetrated the bullet-proof protection in the office of Mrs. Roa^{vii}. WLW office in Bogota has been broken into and computers stolen on three different occasions, the latest being on 23 April this year. They have also suffered several death threats and acts of harassment from 2005 onwards^{viii}.**



- **The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (*Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*) reported surveillance against two of its members, the priest Alberto Franco and Mr. Danilo Rueda, on two occasions since early May 2012, by men travelling on a motorcycle. The priest, current Executive Secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission, has been targeted by media campaigns to discredit his public reports about the situation facing the communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó because of paramilitary operations, business activities in the palm oil and banana industries, and mining extraction projects^{ix}.**
- **On May 5, 2012, paramilitary group Rastrojos-Urban Commandos (*Rastrojos-Comandos Urbanos*) declared 25 organisations and 19 human rights defenders as military targets.** This threat includes numerous national organisations such as SISMA MUJER, JOSE ALVEAR RESTREPO LAWYERS COLLECTIVE, FUNDEPAZ, CASA DE LA MUJER, RUTA PACIFICA, and CODHES and also international organisations such as UNDP and UNHCR.

This paramilitary threat states that, "as we have already started to kill each of them without mercy we will not allow them to harm the policies of our president by making demands on the victims and land law, they will be declared military targets however protected they may be."^x

- **On April 16, 2012, Diego Alejandro Martinez Castillo, Executive Secretary of the Standing Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (*Comité Permanente para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos – CPDH*) based in Bogota, denounced surveillance and alleged illegal acts of intelligence against him^{xi}.**

A few days earlier, in a letter dated April 12, addressed to Minister Germán Vargas Lleras, human rights defender Jahel Quiroga Carrillo, Director of the Reiniciar Corporation (*Corporación Reiniciar*), officially gave up her personal protection scheme (two bodyguards and an armoured car), which she had been assigned after several threats against herself and her family. Ms. Jahel Quiroga Carrillo made this decision because of continuing impunity for attacks against her, lack of action by the Attorney General's Office to identify those responsible, and the denial of access to intelligence files containing information about her.

- **On April 11, 2012 Ms. Nancy Maria Mirama, teacher and community leader and her husband, Mr. Narvaez Libardo Guerrero, former municipal councillor and social leader in the municipality of Sandoná, Department of Nariño, were killed.** They had recently denounced the recruitment of young people by paramilitary groups, particularly the Los Rastrojos group present in the Department of Nariño.
- **On March 23, 2012 Manuel Ruiz Torregloza, land restitution leader from the Curvaradó community, and his 15 year old son, were reported missing and presumed murdered by paramilitaries in Belén de Bajirá, which lies between the departments of Antioquia and Chocó.** Shortly before, they had been held for 30 minutes by the police.



Mr. Ruiz was part of the Community Council Committee of Apartadó, and leader of the land restitution process in the Curvaradó community. He had denounced threats against him and was a beneficiary of protective measures which proved inadequate (he had only been allocated a cell phone). These events occurred one day before an inspection was to be carried out by the government of an area occupied in bad faith by businessmen since 1996 after paramilitary operations. This inspection was to be led by Mr. Manuel Ruiz. The following day the family of Mr. Manuel Ruiz (27 people) were displaced for fear of retaliation by the paramilitaries. A further 38 community members from Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó are currently under threat.

The situation of trade unionists also continues to be of concern. Since early 2012, there have been at least 7 killings of trade unionists, while local unions report that the situation is getting worse, both in terms of their safety and in terms of labour rights^{xii}.

- **On April 27, 2012, Mr. Daniel Aguirre, Secretary General of Sinalcorteros, was killed in the town of Florida, Department of Valle del Cauca.** Sinalcorteros is the union representing sugar cane cutters in that department. Aguirre was a recognized leader who participated in the organisation of the sugar cane cutters and their struggles, particularly against labour outsourcing.

On April 21, 2012 Messrs. Jorge Iván Vélez and Albert Quintero, President and Vice President of SINTRAEMCALI, a trade union in the department of Valle del Cauca, received a death threat signed by the paramilitary group Aguilas Negras, inviting them to their own funeral^{xiii}. These events occurred a week after President Obama announced that the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Colombia will be implemented from May 15, 2012. The threats could be related to Mr. Velez's recent participation in a delegation that met with U.S. authorities in January 2012 to report the serious situation of their union. Sintraemcali members are frequently subjected to threats, attacks and stigmatization while the government refuses to implement the recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO) calling for the reinstatement of 51 unfairly dismissed workers.

While there is no progress towards a peace building process, the armed conflict continues to claim civilian casualties and the legal and illegal armed groups involved continue to flout the norms of International Humanitarian Law.

- **On April 28, 2012 Roméo Langlois, a French journalist from the France 24 news agency, was captured by the FARC** while covering an anti-narcotics operation conducted by the Army. In the past, the journalist has made documentaries raising awareness of, among other issues, the human rights situation of indigenous peoples in the armed conflict.
- **Bombing and machine-gun attacks in areas where civilians live.** We offer as examples the following two recent events. According to a statement from the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca –CRIC*), dated May 1, "it was reported that



close to 10 helicopters of the armed forces of Colombia, under the pretext of fighting the guerrillas, attacked with machine guns and bombed the outskirts of the village called Agua Negra in the indigenous territory of the same name, affecting houses, animals and food crops." Moreover the Association of Villages in Cunaná (*Asociación de Veredas de Cunaná - ASOVEC*), in the municipality of Aguazul, department of Casanare, reported on March 16 "indiscriminate shelling launched from a military base belonging to the 16th Brigade of the Colombian national army."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the situation outlined above, we recommend that:

- Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the External Action Service, issue a public statement on the severity of these events showing support for the work of human rights defenders and Colombian civil society peace initiatives; and that they issue an urgent call for protection and the clarification of these events by the Colombian State.
- The European Parliament, and in particular the Human Rights Sub Committee and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, express their concern at these attacks and ask the External Action Service to undertake concrete actions to ensure that the Colombian government guarantees the protection of threatened persons and the clarification of the events described above; and that they express their support for peace initiatives arising from Colombian civil society.
- EU member states, Switzerland and Norway issue a public statement on the severity of these events showing support for the work of human rights defenders and Colombian civil society peace initiatives; and that they issue an urgent call for protection and the clarification of these events by the Colombian State.

The International Office on Human Rights - Action Colombia, represents a network of more than 30 European organisations. From its headquarters in Brussels, Oidhaco accompanies Colombian civil society initiatives which work towards the full respect of human rights and international humanitarian law, and a negotiated solution to the internal armed conflict



ⁱ <http://www.oidhaco.org/?art=1200&title=Marzo+2012%3A+Recrudescimiento+de+ataques+a+Defensores+y+Defensoras&lang=en>

ⁱⁱ We are Defenders Program (*Programa Somos Defensores*), Quarterly newsletter, Information system on attacks against human rights defenders in Colombia –SIADDHH, Aggressions against Human Rights Defenders in Colombia, January – March 2012, May 2012

ⁱⁱⁱ Article in *Semana* magazine, *Hasta mil millones de pesos se destinarían a plan para matar a Piedad Córdoba*, (Up to one billion pesos offered in plan to murder Piedad Córdoba), article in Spanish, May 9, 2012
<http://www.semana.com/nacion/hasta-mil-millones-pesos-destinarian-plan-para-matar-piedad-cordoba/176937-3.aspx>

^{iv} Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (*Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*), *Amenaza paramilitar a integrantes del Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos – Arauca* (Paramilitary threat to members of the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Arauca , article in Spanish, April 24, 2012 , <http://justiciaypazcolombia.com/Amenaza-paramilitar-a-integrantes>

^v See article in Spanish at: <http://justiciaypazcolombia.com/Desaparecida-dirigente-comunitaria>

^{vi} Article in *El Espectador* newspaper, *Santos pide al movimiento Marcha Patriótica aclarar posibles nexos con Farc* (Santos asks the Patriotic March movement to clarify possible links to the Farc) article in Spanish, April 26, 2012, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/articulo-341598-santos-pide-al-movimiento-marcha-patriotica-aclarar-posibles-nex>

^{vii} Women’s Link Worldwide, Attack against leader Mónica Roa, May 8, 2012

http://www.womenslinkworldwide.org/wlw/new.php?modo=detalle_prensa&dc=355&lang=en

^{viii} Amnesty International, Urgent Action, Women rights defenders’ lives in danger, 11 May 2012

^{ix} Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (*Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*), *Seguimientos a integrantes de la Comisión de Justicia y Paz* (Surveillance of members of the Justice and Peace Commission) article in Spanish, May 9, 2012 <http://justiciaypazcolombia.com/Seguimientos-a-integrantes-de-la>

^x See article in Spanish at: http://justiciaypazcolombia.com/IMG/pdf/COMUNICADO_MAYO.pdf

^{xi} Letter (in Spanish) from the CPDH to the Attorney General’s Office, April 16, 2012.

^{xii} Sinaltrainal, *La situación de los trabajadores y los sindicatos en Colombia es cada vez peor* (The situation of workers and trade unions in Colombia is getting worse), article in Spanish, April 9, 2012,

http://www.sinaltrainal.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2319&Itemid=1

^{xiii} See Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Paramilitaries send unionists an invitation to their own funeral - SINTRAEMCALI subjected to more death threats, April 23, 2012,

http://www.wola.org/commentary/paramilitaries_send_unionists_an_invitation_to_their_own_funeral

