

via fax: 011 57 1 337 5890/342 0592 Sr. Presidente Alvaro Uribe Velez President of the Republic, Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 560 4630 Sr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega Minister of the Interior and Justice, Colombia
via fax: 011 57 1 570 2022/ 2000 Dr.Luis Camilo Osorio Attorney General of the Nation, Colombia	

January 23, 2005

We are extremely concerned for **the safety of Yolanda Becerra**, the President of the Documentation Center at the Popular Women's Organization (OFP) and for the safety of all OFP members in the city of Barrancabermeja, in the Department of Santander, and throughout the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia.

On December 24, 2004 witnesses overheard a paramilitary member say: "I had the opportunity to kill her [when] she was without the internacionales...I regret I did not." [Internacionales refers to Peace Brigades International (PBI), an organization that provides unarmed accompaniment to threatened human rights defenders, including Yolanda Becerra.]

On January 1, 2005 Yolanda Becerra was visiting her mother in the Nuevo Palmira district of Barrancabermeja, accompanied by PBI volunteers. Gunmen traveling in a car and on motorbikes arrived in the Nuevo Palmira district, telling a passerby they were there because of reports of "strange people" in the neighborhood. They left, saying they would return.

On December 2, 2004 a former paramilitary youth entered the OFP kitchen and said, "what...if you arrive one day and they leave you a box with a bomb in it and they kill all of you...?" A parcel was left outside the kitchen the following day; fortunately, it was a hoax.

We have written at least four previous letters urging Colombian officials to protect OFP members:

- June 13, 2002: the oil workers union (USO) was informed of a plot by paramilitaries (AUC) to kill Yolanda Becerra
- June 26, 2003: several OFP members, including Yolanda Becerra, were threatened
- October 26, 2003: Yolanda Becerra received a death threat in September, and paramilitaries murdered OFP member Esperanza Amaris Miranda on October 16
- February 13, 2004: armed men fired upon an OFP delegation as they sailed from Barrancabermeja to San Pablo, and OFP member Ines Peña was abducted and tortured by paramilitaries

Because of the pattern of threats, attacks and murders against OFP members, we demand that you:

- ♦ take all measures (deemed appropriate by OFP members) to guarantee their safety;
- ♦ conduct full and impartial investigations into the threats made against Yolanda Becerra and other OFP members, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- ♦ conduct a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Santander Department and make the results of the investigation public.

We are gravely concerned that your government has taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the Barrancabermeja area, despite UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

copies: Organización Femenina Popular ~ via U.S. mail

Luis Alberto Moreno, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 1 202 232 8643

William B Wood, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011-571-315-2197

Charles Barclay, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202.647.2628

U.S. Senator Voinovich & U.S. Representatives Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via email, fax

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: