

via fax: 011 571 566 20 71 Señor Presidente Alvaro Uribe Vélez President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 ext 2017 Dr. Mario Germán Iguaran Arana Attorney General of Colombia
via fax: 011 571 566 20 64/334 18 17 Dr. Carlos Franco Echevarria Director of Presidential Program for Human Rights and International Law	via fax: 011 571 560 4630 Dr. Carlos Holguín Sardi Minister of the Interior and Justice

June 14, 2008

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force on Central America, are extremely concerned for the personal safety and welfare of **Virgelina Chará**, an active member of the campaign "Make Trade Fair: My Rights Are Not Negotiable" (*Comercio con Justicia: Mis Derechos No Se Negocian*) and a human rights activist with *Asomujer y Trabajo*. *Asomujer* is a grassroots organization that works with people internally displaced by violence in Colombia. She herself is part of the country's Afro-Colombian minority that has been disproportionately affected by the violence. She was forced to flee her home when her son was disappeared after refusing to join paramilitary forces.

After she recently participated in a delegation to the U.S., a man notified her by telephone on May 22 that they had been paid a sum of 15 million pesos (approx. US\$ 8,500) to kill her. He also said that they are warning her that if she does not leave town and stop her advocacy work, they will kill her or kidnap one of her family members. On May 20 and 21, two men on the street had followed, harassed and attempted to kidnap her 15-year old son, **Hanni Alexi Chará**.

Virgelina had also recently received death threats because of her participation in a March 6 demonstration held in homage to victims and in opposition to state and paramilitary human rights violations. These peaceful protests were criminalized by the Uribe administration, which openly stated that they were promoted by the guerrillas. Soon after, several leaders of the march, many of whom are women, including Virgelina Chará, received death threats from the paramilitary group *Aguilas Negras*. At least six of these leaders have been assassinated.

As a result of the above events and our concern for the safety of Virgelina Chará and her family, **we strongly urge** you to:

- ensure that all measures are taken to guarantee the safety of the Virgelina Chará, her family and other humanitarian leaders, in accordance with their wishes;
- order full and impartial investigations into the death threats against Virgelina Chará and other humanitarian leaders, publish the results and bring all those responsible to justice;
- produce policy and plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders, to guarantee their safety according to the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and make these plans public.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Coordinator

CC: Carolina Barco Isakson, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 William Brownfield, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.315.2197
 Heather Merritt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173
 Paolo Carozza US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Latta, LaTourette, Kaptur, Kucinich, Regula, Ryan, Sutton, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

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