

Via fax: 011 57 1 566 7682
Dr. Francisco Santos Calderon
Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia

Via Fax: 011 57 1 414 9108
Dr. Guillermo Mendoza Diago
Acting Attorney General of Colombia

December 1, 2009

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned for the safety of human rights defender, **Ingrid Vergara**, and her daughter, 14-year-old **Cendy Torres Vergara**. On October 26 at 1:15pm a white car with tinted windows and without license plates followed Cendy Torres while she was walking to school in Sincelejo, Sucre Department. When the car slowed down, two children who were walking past went up to it and then approached Cendy Torres to tell her, "They want you to let your mom know that she must shut up if she wants to reach the new year."

Cendy Torres had noticed the same car following her on October 19, 20 and 21. On October 21, neighbors told Ingrid Vergara that a white pick-up truck with tinted windows had driven past her house several times, slowing down every time it passed.

Ingrid Vergara is a member of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE), a coalition of civil society organizations campaigning for truth, justice and reparation for the victims of human rights violations committed during Colombia's long-running armed conflict. She is one of the leaders of MOVICE in Sucre and has drawn public attention to enforced disappearances and killings committed by paramilitary forces.

We have previously written to authorities about human rights abuses against MOVICE members. We were happy to learn last month about the pending release of Carmelo Agamez, Technical Secretary of MOVICE in Sucre, who had been unjustly detained for almost a year in Sucre. Unfortunately, Agamez's unjust detention is just one emblematic example of a much bigger problem: the extensive use of malicious criminal investigations and trumped-up charges to silence human rights activists in Colombia.

These recent threats and acts of intimidation to her and her daughter are similar to ones they have received during the past year. On April 2, 2008, Cendy Torres was approached outside her school by four unknown men who threatened: "we are going to kill you because of what your mother is doing." On July 2, 2009 Ingrid Vergara received an anonymous email inviting her to her own funeral and referring to her as a guerrilla. Although the authorities have agreed to some protection measures, they have not fully implemented them. No one has been brought to justice for any of these threats.

We **strongly** urge that you

- guarantee the safety of Ingrid Vergara and Cendy Torres in strict accordance with their wishes;
- carry out a full and impartial investigation into all death threats against them, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- adhere to your obligations regarding the situation of human rights defenders, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Sincerely

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Comision Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz ~ via US mail
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
Nan N. Fife, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173
Javier Hernández Valencia, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Colombia office ~ via fax: 011.571. 658-3300
Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Boccieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

UA301/09Colombia