

via fax: 011 57 1 565 7682 Dr. Francisco Santos Calderon Vicepresident of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 414 91 08 Sr. Guillermo Mendoza Diago Acting Attorney General of Colombia
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December 2, 2009

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are seriously concerned for the welfare and safety of **Luz Elsia Almanza**, the coordinator of the Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (ASFADDES) in the city of Barrancabermeja, Santander Department. On November 18 she received a threatening SMS (text) message from an unidentified caller: "Ms. Luz Almanza this is to let you know that you as representative of the organization which you are leading are declared a military target, sincerely self defense forces." A second text message followed saying, "Gaitanistas." The Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces are a paramilitary group operating in northern Colombia.

She received the messages while she was in a meeting at the Barrancabermeja mayor's office to discuss establishing May 16 as a Victims' Day to commemorate a paramilitary massacre which took place there on May 16, 1998. Her partner was the victim of an enforced disappearance following the massacre. For years, nobody was detained for their part in the massacre, but this year four people have been detained. One suspect was to testify before the courts on November 30.

ASFADDES is a national non-governmental human rights organization made up of relatives of victims of enforced disappearance who work to find out what has happened to their relatives and to bring those responsible to justice. Since the beginning of this year Luz Elsia Almanza's home and the ASFADDES office have been watched by unknown men. On April 23 she was approached by two men who identified themselves as paramilitaries and made verbal threats. Since November 22 there have been rumors circulating in Barrancabermeja that her name is on a list of people whom the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces are planning to kill. On November 26, two men slowly passed her house on motorbikes.

Because of our continued concern for the safety of Elsia Almanza, her family and other members of ASFADDES, we strongly urge that you:

- immediately provide protection for those threatened, in accordance with their wishes;
- order a full and impartial investigation into the threats described above and previous incidents of harassment;
- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations;
- adhere to your obligations to support the work of human rights defenders, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

cc: ASFADDES ~ 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 ~ via email
US Representatives Bocchieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

UA 319/09_Colombia

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