

Via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia	Via fax: 011 57 1 599 8961 Sr. Germán Vargas Lleras Minister of the Interior and Justice of Colombia
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November 23, 2010

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply distressed about threats to **William Cristancho Duarte**, a human right lawyer from Corporación Compromiso. He was working on the cases of the extrajudicial executions of Julio César Cardozo Quiñónez and José del Carmen Barbosa Patiño, two local peasant farmers who had been killed on October 19, 2007 during a military operation of the Battalion of Engineers Francisco José de Caldas in the area of Chucuri-San Isidoro, Piedecuesta Municipality, Santander Department. They were initially presented as guerrillas killed in combat (i.e., "false positives").

On October 26, William Cristancho met with local judicial officials in Piedecuesta to discuss the possible detention of members of the Battalion of Engineers Francisco José de Caldas for their participation in the killings. The preliminary hearing was rescheduled to November 18. After the meeting he received a call on his mobile from a man who said, "What are you doing. . . lawyer, enemy of the army?" Five minutes later, a man approached him about two blocks from the main square, saying, "Make way. . . defender of guerrillas we are watching you closely." A witness to the killings was also threatened.

William Cristancho Duarte has been providing legal advice and representation for victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, especially for the families of victims of extrajudicial executions carried out by members of the armed forces and are then presented as "guerrillas killed in combat." During the four decades of armed conflict in Colombia, extrajudicial executions have been carried out by the security forces in a widespread and systematic manner. The Attorney General's office is currently investigating more than 2,000 of these cases. Those campaigning for justice in these cases have been repeatedly subject to death threats or have been killed by members of the security forces or paramilitaries working with them.

Because we believe that the lives of William Cristancho Duarte and the witness to the October 19, 2007 killings are in danger, we **strongly urge you to take the following actions:**

- ensure protection measures for William Cristancho Duarte and the witness as agreed to by them;
- conduct a full and impartial investigation into the threats against them and prosecute those responsible;
- take decisive action to end extrajudicial executions and guarantee, in line with repeated United Nations human rights recommendations, the protection of those campaigning for justice;
- fulfill your obligations to ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their work without fear, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Corporación Compromiso (NGO) ~ via US mail
 Gabriel Silva, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 William Brownfield, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.315.2197
 Terry Steers-Gonzalez, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
 Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650
 Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Colombia member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Bocchieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email
 UA242_10/Colombia

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