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| via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of Colombia | via fax: 011 57 1 266 1003 Sr. Juan Carlos Pinzón Minister of Defense, Colombia |
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January 26, 2012

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply concerned for the safety and welfare of Colombian human rights defender **Abelardo Sánchez Serrano**, a staff member of the Regional Human Rights Corporation (CREDHOS) in Barrancabermeja, Santander Department. On January 13 when he was on his way to the CREDHOS office, one of two men who approached him on a motorbike, pointed a pistol at him and told him to stop “denigrating the armed forces. We already have one son-of-a-bitch guerrilla of CREDHOS in jail, and if it is necessary to give it to the rest of them, we will do it to shut you up.” They told him he had 72 hours to leave the city. He now fears that his life and the lives of other CREDHOS activists are in danger.

CREDHOS campaigns for justice for victims of human rights violations committed by the security forces, sometimes in collusion with paramilitary groups, around Barrancabermeja and the Magdalena Medio region.. In recent years they have also campaigned on more than 20 cases of extrajudicial executions of civilians (“false positives”) carried out by members of the armed forces, who falsely claimed the victims were “guerrillas killed in combat.” The day before Abelardo Sánchez Serrano was threatened, CREDHOS had helped to organize a press conference calling for an event commemorating the 23rd anniversary of the killings of 12 judicial officials in Santander on January 18, 1989 who had been investigating the role of the security forces and paramilitaries in the deaths of 19 people.

We are very aware that during the more than 40-year-long armed conflict in Colombia, extrajudicial executions have been carried out by the security forces in a widespread and systematic manner as part of the terror tactics of their counter-insurgency strategy. Those campaigning for justice in these cases have been subject to death threats or have been killed by members of security forces or paramilitaries working with them.

Therefore we **strongly urge** that you:

- ✓ take immediate steps to protect Abelardo Sánchez Serrano and other members of CREDHOS, in line with their wishes;
- ✓ order a full and impartial investigation into the death threats against him, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- ✓ take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with security forces, in line with government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations;
- ✓ carry out 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

copies: CREDHOS via US mail
 Gabriel Silva Luján, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 P. Michael McKinley, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.315.0811
 Terry Steers-Gonzalez, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173
 Dinah Shelton, Chair, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Second Vice-Chair, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown and Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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