

COLOMBIA: Government Officials Pledge to Protect Women's Rights Group Members

UA 144/02, first issued May 13 2002

(RRN letters [6/13/02](#), [6/26/03](#), [9/26/03](#), [10/26/03](#), [2/13/04](#), [1/23/05](#))

RRN members have written six letters to Colombian officials on behalf of staff and members of the Popular Women's Organization, or OFP (Organizacion Femenina Popular) in Barrancabermeja, Santander. Yolanda Becerra, President of the OFP, has been targeted by the AUC, the largest paramilitary group in Colombia. The OFP denounces human rights abuses committed by the AUC, as they attempt to control the region.

TIMELINE

- May 2002: oil union workers and local police discover AUC plot to kill Becerra
- May 2003: Becerra receives a message that the paramilitaries might shoot 20 of her colleagues; 2 OFP members received death threats
- August 2003: OFP member Julia Sierra is threatened at gunpoint by AUC, while they force her husband Jose Armando Garzon (bread salesman and community activist) from their home
- Sep 2003: AUC declares the OFP to be a "military target" and threatens to kill Becerra
- October 2003: OFP member Esperanza Amaris Miranda is abducted from her house in Barrancabermeja by 3 AUC members, killed in front of a neighborhood school, and her body thrown into the middle of the street.
- January 2004: OFP staff person Ines Peña is forced into a van and tortured; a humanitarian delegation to a housing project for the poor, including OFP members, was fired upon by the army
- December 2004: a former paramilitary youth threatened to bomb the OFP office; a box was left outside the kitchen the following day (a hoax).
- January 2005: Becerra, accompanied by Peace Brigades International volunteers, was followed by gunmen
- June 2005: The Presidential Human Rights Program of the Colombian government responds to IRTF RRN members (see below)

Colombian Government Responds to IRTF and RRN members: On June 1 2005, the Presidential Human Rights Program (PDH) of Colombia wrote IRTF to give an update of their protective measures for OFP staff and members. They reported that since November 2004, the Presidential Human Rights Program (PDH) has been coordinating with the Police Department and the City of Barrancabermeja to increase protection for the OFP headquarters.

The PDH is in conversation every two days with Yolanda Becerra in order to change or adopt security measures as necessary.

Through investigations, authorities discovered that the following individuals were responsible for the assassination of OFP member Esperanza Amaris Miranda in October 2003: José Ricardo Rodríguez (alias Wilson), Margel Aldana (alias "Promasa") y Jhon Alberto Manjares (alias "Cama"). A warrant was issued, charging them with aggravated homicide and terrorism. Olinto Amorocho, the driver, was also implicated. Rodríguez Manjares and Aldana were arrested December 21 and 22, 2003. The case was transferred to the Attorney General's office. All four men are imprisoned in the Barrancabermeja jail, pending transfer to the Bucaramanga jail (as of June 2005).

RRN letters faxed/mailed to Colombian officials on behalf of OFP:

The threats and other abuses against OFP members have been carried out by members of the AUC. In all letters, RRN members call on the Colombian government to conduct an impartial investigation into links between the military and the paramilitaries operating in Barrancabermeja, a city with some of the most political violence in Colombia.

- 6/13/02: RRN members call for an immediate and full investigation into the death threats
- 6/26/03: RRN members urge protection for all OFP members
- 9/26/03: RRN members urge investigation into the threats against Julia Sierra and the whereabouts of her husband and other disappeared residents of Barrancabermeja
- 10/26/03: RRN members urge investigation into the assassination of OFP member Esperanza Amaris Miranda and protection for Yolanda Becerra
- 2/13/04: RRN members call for an immediate and full investigation into the attack on Ines Peña and OFP members
- 1/23/05: RRN members urge protection for all OFP members and call for an investigation into the threats against Yolanda Becerra