



InterReligious Task Force on Central America

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educating and advocating
for human rights since 1981

President of Colombia President Alvaro Uribe Velez, (fax) 011-571-337-5890 or 011-571-566-2071	Attorney General of Colombia Dr. Mario German Iguaran (fax) 011-57-1-570-2000
Director of the Presidential Human Rights Commission Dr. Carlos Franco (fax) 011-571-337-4667	Colombian ambassador to the United States Andres Pastrana (fax) 1-202-232-8643

March 11, 2006

Dear Sirs,

We are alarmed at specific new threats against the lives of the **Rev. Milton Mejia** and **Mauricio Avilez** of the Ecumenical Church Network of Colombia. The network has documented these threats in an official report delivered in Bogotá during the week of Feb. 7, 2006.

Religious leaders who work with Colombians displaced by violence say millions of internal refugees are defenseless against paramilitary and guerrilla militias and government forces. In a country with virtually no social safety net, the poorest people turn to the church for help with shelter, food and medical care. Responding to their needs is increasingly risky.

During a 2004 incarceration and interrogation of **Mauricio Avilez**, the Presbyterian church learned that its Barranquilla headquarters was under constant surveillance and that ring-wing forces were trying to link the church to the leftist guerrilla movement. This is outrageous.

These leaders are defending the democratic and constitutional rights of victims of violence in Colombia. As their record of public service proves, they are committed to non-partisan, non-violent, life-affirming works of truth, faith and peace. Their lives are committed to overcoming violence and creating more space for the empowerment of civic institutions.

We strongly urge that you

- take action to guarantee the safety of **Rev. Milton Mejia** and **Mauricio Avilez** and members of the Ecumenical Network of Colombia in accordance with their wishes;
- recognize the right of religious organizers to carry out their legitimate work without any fear of reprisals, as stated by the United Nations
- Take decisive action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area and to break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

CC: Ambassador William B Word, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via fax
 Dr. Francisco Santos, Vicepresidente de Colombia ~ via fax
 Dr. Michael Frulin, Colombia office, UN High Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax
 Dra. Maria Carolina Barco Isakson, Colombian Minister of Foreign Relations ~ via fax
 Heather Meritt, Colombia Desk Officer, US State Department ~ via fax
 US Senators DeWine & Voinovich ~ via email
 US Representatives Brown, Gillmor, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Regula, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

UA 29/06 Colombia

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