

via fax 011 57 1 596 0631

Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos
President of the Republic of Colombia

via fax: 011 57 1 283 9876

Estimado Sr. Federico Renjifo Vélez
Minister of the Interior of Colombia

September 23, 2012

Dear Sirs:

We are concerned for the safety of **Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez**, a member of the Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (ASFADDES), who was threatened by the paramilitary group Los Urabeños on September 6 in Barrancabermeja, Santander. Other members of ASFADDES are also under threat.

On September 4, two men on a motorbike took pictures of Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez (coordinator of the Barrancabermeja branch of ASFADDES) and her mother. Later that day, two men on a different motorbike parked in front of their house in Barrancabermeja and watched the house for several minutes. On September 6, Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez received a threatening text message from Los Urabeños, telling her to put an end to her campaigning relating to the killing and enforced disappearance of John Jairo Amador Valencia. She continued to be followed after the threat.

John Jairo Amador Valencia was disappeared on May 20. His dead body, with hands and feet tied up, was found two days later in the small village of Tenerife in Barrancabermeja. The killing followed the anniversary of the enforced disappearance of his cousin Riky Nelson Garcia along with 24 other people in Barrancabermeja, on May 16, 1998. In January 2009 the body of Riky Nelson García, together with four other men who had been disappeared, was found in a mass grave.

On July 27, a phone call was made to the office of ASFADDES in Bogotá, in which a recording was played, offering them two free spaces in a cemetery. On August 30, ASFADDES and other nongovernmental organizations held events to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. Some men behaving suspiciously attended both the Bogotá and Medellín events, taking pictures of ASFADDES members.

Because harassment and threats against ASFADDES members have intensified recently, **we strongly urge you to:**

- order a full and impartial investigation into the threats to and surveillance of Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- guarantee the safety of Luz Elsia Almanza Suárez and members of ASFADDES, in accordance with their wishes;
- fulfill your obligations to protect the rights of human rights defenders to carry out their legitimate work;
- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with Colombia's security forces.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

cc: ASFADDES ~ 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: 011.571.275 4600
Mary Brett Rogers-Springs, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

UA 268/12_Colombia

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