



February 22, 2010

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Dear Sirs,

We, the below-signed 2,355 individuals, join Human Rights First in writing to express our concern over the recent death threats received by many women's rights leaders in Colombia including the human rights organization *Corporación Sisma Mujer*. *Sisma Mujer* is a women's rights organization that works with women human rights defenders to protect those communities that have been forcefully displaced due to Colombia's armed conflict.

On January 27, 2010, *Sisma Mujer* received a threatening email from the paramilitary group, the Black Eagles (*Águilas Negras*). The email threatens *Sisma Mujer* and dozens of women human rights defenders who work with communities forcibly displaced by Colombia's armed conflict.

In the email the Black Eagles accuse these human rights defenders of having links with terrorist guerilla forces. This is a false and dangerous claim and an accusation that is often perpetuated by members of the Colombian state. Such claims not only put the lives of defenders in danger by making them paramilitary targets, but they also discredit the important human rights advocacy engaged in by defenders.

Unfortunately this is not the first time that *Sisma Mujer* and other women leaders have been threatened by the Black Eagles paramilitary group. Similar death threats were sent in October 2009, after *Sisma Mujer* had participated in a meeting to help women who had been forcefully displaced from their homes.

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The multiple threats received by human rights defenders clearly show the ongoing existence of paramilitary forces in Colombia. We urge the Colombian government to redouble its efforts to dismantle paramilitary structures rather than denying that they exist.

We urge you to investigate the threats made by the Black Eagles paramilitary organization and prosecute those responsible. We also urge you to provide the members of *Sisma Mujer* and the other threatened organizations with adequate and immediate security measures for themselves and their families. More specifically, we call upon you to reform the protection program to consider the particular needs of women human rights defenders and the gendered nature of the persecution that they face.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We will continue to closely monitor this situation.

Sincerely,

(The names of the 2,355 signatories have been removed for privacy reasons.)