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May 27, 2009

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Your Excellencies,

We, **the below-signed 1,364 signatories, join Human Rights First** in writing to express our grave concern about recent incidents that we fear are attempts to silence Colombian human rights defenders.

On April 22, 2009, in Bucaramanga, two unknown men assaulted Mauricio Meza Blanco, President of the Board of the Organization for the Development of the East (*Compromiso*). Meza is a well-known human rights activist in Bucaramanga who has been working to publicize the grave environmental effects of several large agricultural and energy projects in the area. That evening, a van pulled up in front of Meza's house just as he was leaving. Two men jumped out, while the driver remained at the wheel with the engine running. They violently tackled Meza, attempting to drag him into the van. The assailants reportedly made reference to his work while they assaulted him. Meza resisted until two police officers passed by, after which the two assailants drove away. We are concerned that the assault is tied to Meza's recent television appearance and human rights work as a leader of *Compromiso*.

In another part of the country, in early May 2009, a military intelligence report was discovered in the department of Caquetá. The report listed 97 individuals as members of the Support Network for the Amazon Front of the FARC rebel

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group. The report was written by Lieutenant Colonel Rafael Eduardo Gutierrez Hortua, director of the Regional Military Intelligence Unit No. 6 in Florencia (No MD-EJC-CIME-RIME6-53.1, February 12, 2008).

Included among the human rights lawyers, university professors, and community leaders was Domingo Emilio Perez Cuellar, president of the Caquetá chapter of the respected National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE). The document, dated February 12, 2008, stated that a criminal process was underway against them. Many of the human rights defenders included in the report planned to participate in a Truth Hearing in Caquetá just a few days after the report came to light. The hearing was designed to air testimony about extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations allegedly committed by the army. We understand that the Ministry of Defense has not confirmed the authenticity of the report, but that at least ten people included on the list have been arrested in military raids.

Moreover, in Medellin media outlets have reported the existence of various intelligence reports by the Technical Investigation Unit's 74th prosecutor in Antioquia, in coordination with the 4th Army Brigade (7th Regional Military Intelligence Unit). The reports allegedly state that a range of non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders are part of the FARC guerrilla. Included in these reports are the Judicial Freedom Organization (CJL) and its lawyers Elkin Ramirez and Bayron Gongora, renowned human rights defenders who have been subject to previous baseless prosecutions. We are also alarmed by the existence of a falsified document purportedly in the name of CJL, dated May 4, 2009, that seeks to link various human rights defenders with the guerilla. The CJL categorically denies the authenticity of this document and its appearance at the same time as the intelligence reports suggests a disturbing connection that should be investigated.

We are concerned that these incidents are an attempt to silence human rights defenders who courageously expose human rights violations. In the case of Mauricio Meza, we ask that Prosecutor's office in Bucaramanga open an investigation into the assault and work with the police to apprehend the perpetrators. We also ask that the Interior and Justice Ministry convene a meeting of its Risk Evaluation Committee (CRER) in Bucaramanga to assess Mr. Meza's protection scheme and to evaluate the risks that other human rights defenders face in Bucaramanga.

In the case of the Caquetá and Medellin intelligence reports, we ask that the Defense Ministry and the Prosecutor-General's office confirm the authenticity of the documents. They should also either provide conclusive evidence that the human rights defenders listed are in fact members of the FARC unit or publicly clear their names and initiate an investigation and disciplinary proceedings against the intelligence officials that prepared the documents. Moreover, the Prosecutor's office should review the detentions of people listed in the intelligence report to see if the new *Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Law* has been breached. That law prohibits intelligence reports from being used as evidence in criminal investigations. Finally the Prosecutor General's office should investigate why these investigations are being conducted under the old criminal procedural code (law 6000 of 2000)

when the events that are being investigated reportedly occurred after the date when the new code entered in force (law 906 of 2004). The new code provides increased protections to the accused.

Human Rights First recently documented over 30 cases of baseless prosecutions of human rights defenders, many of them improperly based on intelligence reports. We urge you to act firmly to ensure that this practice ends, and that any and all unfair criminal charges be dropped immediately.

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

Sincerely,

(The names of the 1,364 signatories have been hidden for privacy reasons.)