

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 14, 2006

Condoleezza Rice  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

As you are well aware, strengthening human rights, democracy, and the rule of law are principle bipartisan goals of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. We are therefore greatly concerned about increased threats and continued attacks against Colombian human rights defenders and other leaders of civil society. We believe you, your good offices and the U.S. Embassy in Colombia can play a positive and constructive role by making vigorous efforts to protect such leaders and to support the legitimate and central role of human rights work in consolidating democracy and the rule of law in Colombia.

As a September 2006 Amnesty International report asserts, "Despite various support and protection programs, human rights defenders in Colombia continue to be threatened, intimidated and attacked. The persistence and extent of these abuses are a clear indication that there is a lack of political determination to ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their work in safety." In August, the Colombia Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights also expressed its concern regarding "the persistence of criminal actions intended to intimidate human rights defenders."

In the past year, human rights defenders have been attacked, killed and disappeared. Among the sectors harshly affected are union leaders, leaders of national and local human rights groups, indigenous and Afro-Colombian community activists, religious leaders, women's organizations and journalists. Alleged perpetrators include all actors in the conflict, and paramilitary groups, despite the demobilization process, continue to be the main source of threats and attacks against defenders.

Many of Colombia's most prominent human rights groups, as well as indigenous associations, labor rights groups, and media associations, received email death threats signed by self-described re-grouped paramilitaries between March and September of this year. During the same period, there were several break-ins at the offices of non-governmental organizations where information and computers were stolen. We are particularly concerned about the break-in that occurred this August at the office of the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES) in which its database on displacement was removed because of the unmistakable signal it sends to displaced persons and those who advocate on their behalf.

We believe the State Department and the U.S. Embassy can take a number of steps to protect such leaders. The first and most vital is to urge the Colombian government to thoroughly investigate and prosecute these threats and attacks, and the U.S. Embassy should closely monitor

the progress of these cases. In the attached annex, we have highlighted several serious cases, and we would appreciate a response from the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá regarding their status.

Second, the U.S. government should urge the Colombian government to make consistent public statements supporting the legitimacy and importance of the work carried out by human rights defenders and to promote television and radio campaigns that emphasize the legitimacy of human rights work. We have been struck by the fact that one of the most notable requests coming from human rights groups under threat is simply for "words that restore confidence" from Colombia's president and other high-level officials. The U.S. Embassy should reinforce this message by increasing its show of support to human rights and social organizations, as it has at other critical moments in the past. Prior actions by the Embassy that we believe have been particularly effective include periodic visits by embassy officials to groups' offices, supportive public statements and the inclusion of such groups in Embassy-sponsored events.

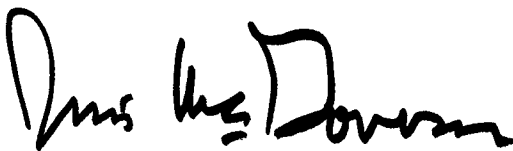
Third, the State Department should urge the Colombian government to sanction public officials who denigrate human rights groups and ensure officials do not employ unfounded legal actions against defenders as a means of harassment. In addition, the Colombian government should fulfill the recommendation by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights that military intelligence files be reviewed to purge faulty information regarding human rights groups and their legitimate activities. The U.S. Embassy should also encourage the Colombian government to convene a meeting with human rights and union leaders in order to improve the government program designed to provide them with protection. Confidence in this program was undermined following allegations that the former head of the state security agency, DAS, which plays a role in the protection program, operated in concert with a paramilitary group that assassinated social leaders.

Finally, it is imperative that the State Department urge the Colombian government to investigate any re-emerging paramilitary groups; prosecute and capture members of paramilitary groups that have refused to disarm; and suspend, investigate and prosecute members of the Colombian military or police credibly alleged to have aided or abetted paramilitary forces.

We would greatly appreciate hearing from the State Department regarding specific measures that you and other State Department and U.S. Embassy officials are taking to convey these important messages and improve policies and programs to support human rights defenders and other civil society leaders and organizations.

We would like to thank you in advance for your attention to these serious matters, and we look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



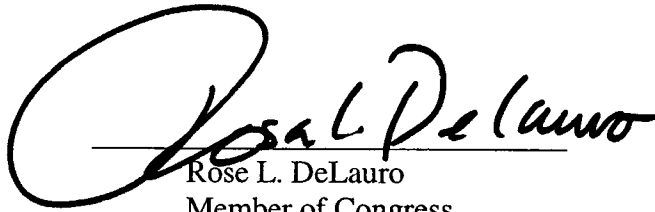
Joseph R. Pitts  
Member of Congress



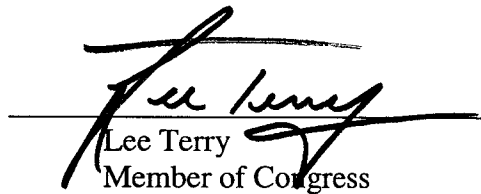
Donald M. Payne  
Member of Congress



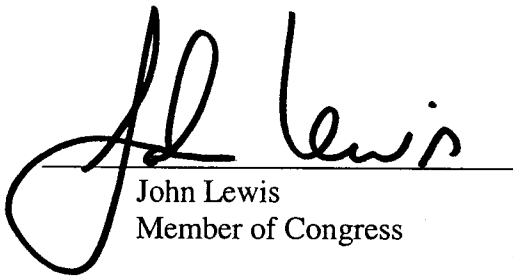
Todd R. Platts  
Member of Congress



Rose L. DeLauro  
Member of Congress



Lee Terry  
Member of Congress



John Lewis  
Member of Congress



Rahm Emanuel  
Member of Congress



Barney Frank  
Member of Congress



Christopher H. Smith  
Member of Congress



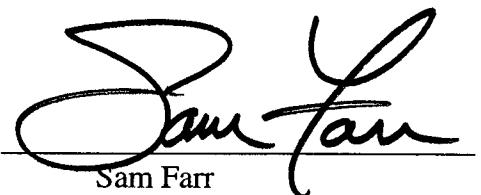
Dennis Kucinich  
Member of Congress



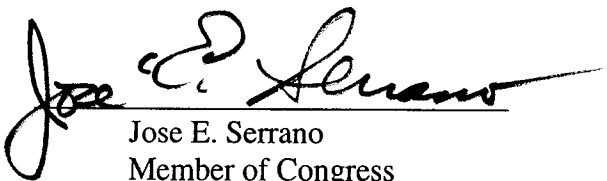
Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress



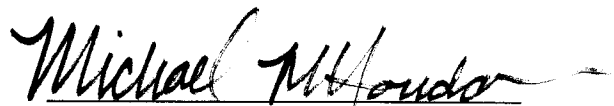
James L. Oberstar  
Member of Congress



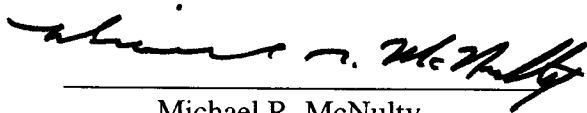
Sam Farr  
Member of Congress



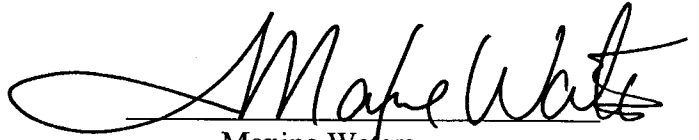
Jose E. Serrano  
Member of Congress



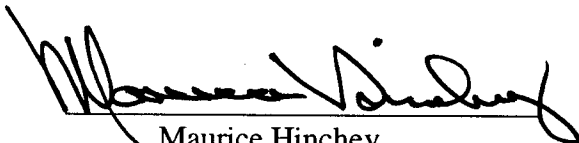
Michael M. Honda  
Member of Congress



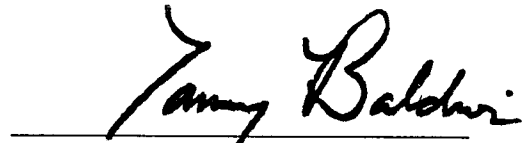
Michael R. McNulty  
Member of Congress



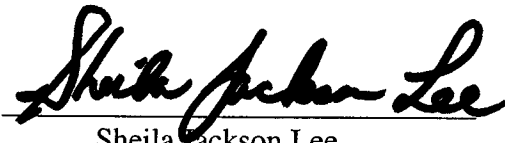
Maxine Waters  
Member of Congress



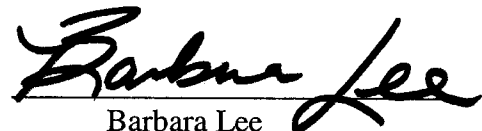
Maurice Hinchey  
Member of Congress



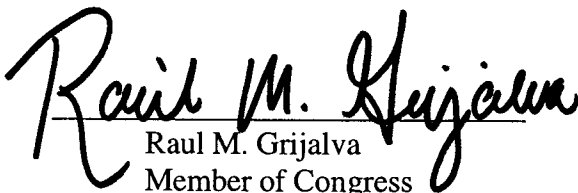
Tammy Baldwin  
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



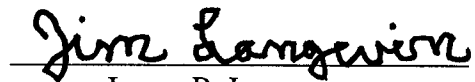
Raul M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



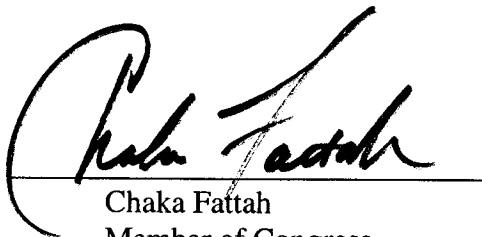
Elijah Cummings  
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Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress



James R. Langevin  
Member of Congress



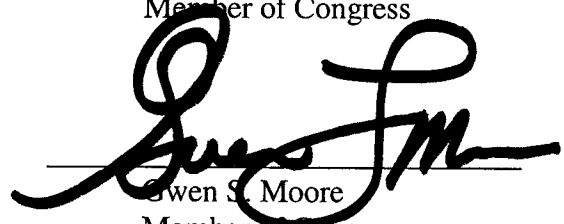
Chaka Fattah  
Member of Congress



Dan Lipinski  
Member of Congress



Marty Meehan  
Member of Congress



Owen S. Moore  
Member of Congress

*Wm. Lacy Clay*

Wm. Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress

*Dennis Moore*

Dennis Moore  
Member of Congress

*Alice L. Hastings*

Alice L. Hastings  
Member of Congress

*Howard L. Berman*

Howard L. Berman  
Member of Congress

*Charles A. Gonzalez*

Charles A. Gonzalez  
Member of Congress

*Bobby L. Rush*

Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress

*Grace F. Napolitano*

Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

*Leonard L. Boswell*

Leonard L. Boswell  
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*Robert I. Wexler*

Robert I. Wexler  
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*Loretta Sanchez*

Loretta Sanchez  
Member of Congress

*Janice Schakowsky*

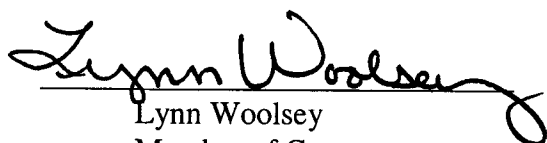
Janice Schakowsky  
Member of Congress


*Rush Holt*

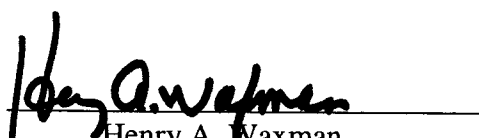
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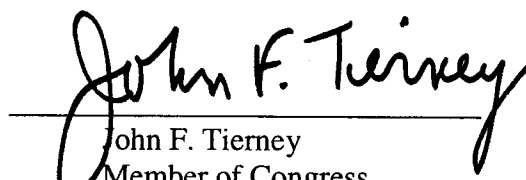
*Patrick J. Kennedy*


Patrick J. Kennedy  
Member of Congress

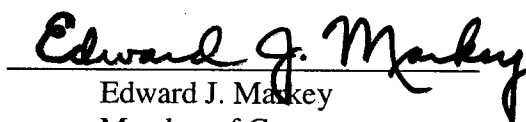
  
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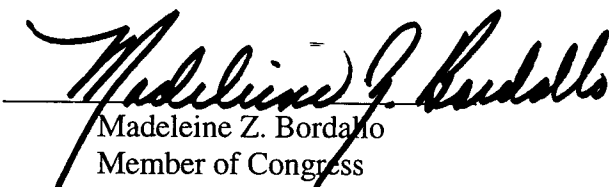
  
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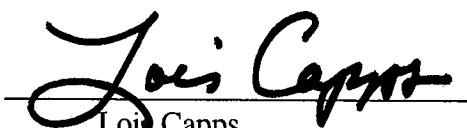
  
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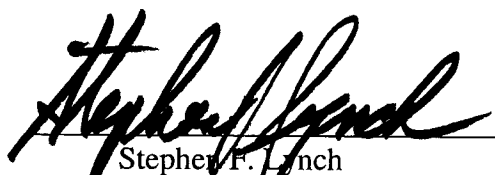
  
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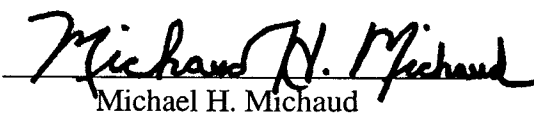
  
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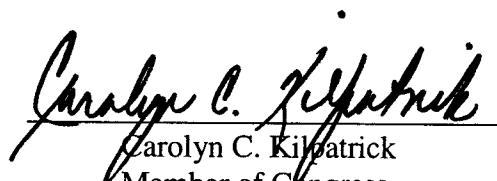
  
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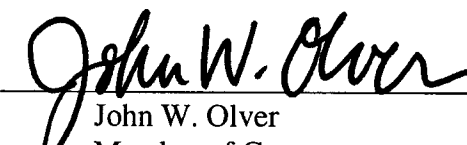
  
Madeleine Z. Bordallo  
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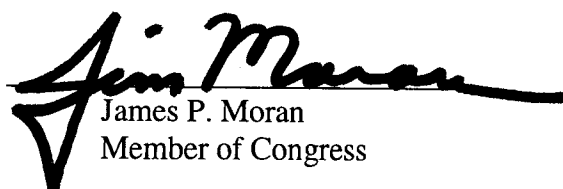
  
Lois Capps  
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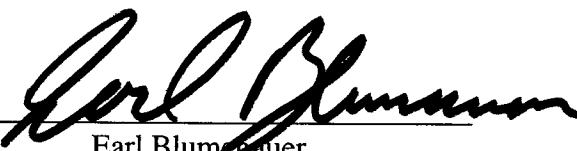
  
Stephen F. Lynch  
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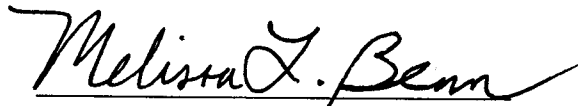
  
Michael H. Michaud  
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Carolyn C. Kilpatrick  
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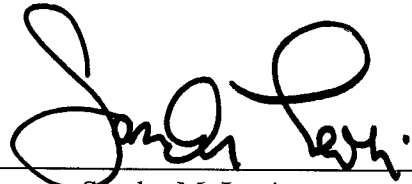
  
John W. Olver  
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James P. Moran  
Member of Congress

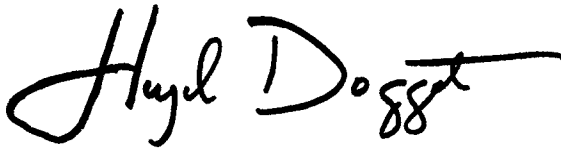
  
Earl Blumenauer  
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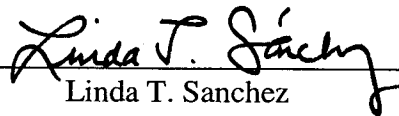
Melissa L. Bean  
Member of Congress



Sander M. Levin  
Member of Congress



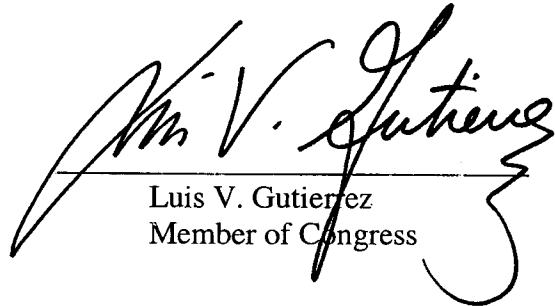
Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress



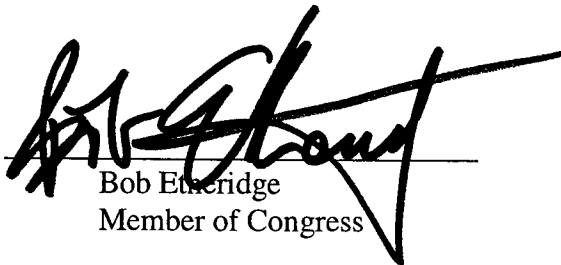
Linda T. Sanchez  
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



Luis V. Gutierrez  
Member of Congress



Bob Etheridge  
Member of Congress

Member of Congress

cc: Thomas Shannon, Assistant Secretary of State, Western Hemisphere Affairs  
William Wood, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia

## **Annex of Cases of Threats and Attacks Against Human Rights Defenders in Colombia, 2006**

**Threats against defenders allegedly from re-grouped paramilitaries:** Organizations and individuals receiving e-mail and other threats purporting to come from re-grouped paramilitary organizations include:

- Human rights groups such as the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (CAJAR), MINGA, Corporation for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (REINICIAR), and the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES);
- Victims' movements, including Iván Cepeda Castro of the Manuel Cepeda Foundation; the Colombian Platform of Human Rights, Democracy and Development; the National Indigenous Association of Colombia (ONIC); the Committee in Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP);
- Research institutes such as the Jesuit Center for Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP) and the Latin American Institute for Alternative Legal Services (ILSA); professors and students from the University of Antioquia; and the Association of Educators in Cauca (ASOINCA) in Popayan;
- Trade unions, including the main labor federation, CUT, and the National Labor School (ENS);
- The Civil Society Assembly for Peace; and
- Journalists and media groups such as the Colombian Association of Radio and Television Workers (ACOTV) and Media for Peace.
- In August 2006, the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes reportedly discovered a list of 26 of their members in Sucre whom paramilitaries wanted to kill.
- On November 26, 2006, the driver of the car belonging to the Manuel Cepeda Foundation was stopped by armed men in Bogota; Ivan Cepeda Castor, director of the foundation, was testifying the next day (November 27<sup>th</sup>) at a public hearing in San Onofre, Sucre, exploring the links between government officials and paramilitaries.
- Break-ins in which work-related information was stolen include: August 3 and April 25, CODHES; April 22, apartment of CAJAR human rights lawyer Rafael Barrios.

### **Civil society activists killed or disappeared:**

- Yamile Agudelo Peñaloza, a member of the Popular Women's Organization, whose body was found March 22 in a dump near Barrancabermeja with signs of rape and torture;
- Jaime Enrique Gómez Velásquez, an advisor to Congresswoman Piedad Córdoba and presidential candidate Horacio Serpa, who was disappeared on March 22 and whose body was found on the outskirts of Bogotá several weeks later;
- Wilson García Reatiga, president of the Collective Action Committee of Tame (Arauca) and witness in the 1998 Santo Domingo case, allegedly assassinated March 21 by the FARC guerrillas, who had threatened García shortly before the assassination;
- Higinio Baquero Mahecha, bodyguard to the director of REINICIAR, assassinated on April 12;
- Luis Guevara, member of the national Movement of Victims of State Crimes, reportedly killed by paramilitaries on August 22 in San Onofre, Sucre;
- Juan Daniel Guerra Camargo, member of the Social Integration Committee of Catatumbo, assassinated allegedly by FARC guerrillas on September 22; and
- Julián Andrés Hurtado Castillo, a student council representative at the local university who had campaigned for an investigation into the murder of a fellow student, killed October 4 allegedly by professional hitmen in Cali, Valle del Cauca.

**Union leaders:** From January-October 24, 2006, 50 union members have been assassinated, 3 kidnapped and 5 disappeared, while 130 have received threats, according to the National Labor School. Of a total of 225 violations of all types, the National Labor School identifies 77 as allegedly perpetrated by paramilitaries and 12 by the guerrillas, with 17 (including arbitrary detentions) allegedly committed by the army and police. Among those murdered:

- Héctor Díaz Serrano, member of the USO petroleum workers' union, assassinated in a neighborhood of Barrancabermeja reportedly under paramilitary control (March 2);
- Gregorio Izquierdo Meléndez, president of the Public Sector Workers Union in Arauca (SINTRAEMSERPA), killed in Arauca City after receiving threats from paramilitaries (September 13);
- Alejandro Uribe, member of the Federation of Agro-Mining for southern Bolivar (FEDEAGROMISBOL), killed in Monte Cristo, Bolivar, September 19, reportedly by members of the Air Defense Battalion "Nueva Granada," part of the Colombian army.
- Jesús Marino Mosquero, leader of the National Union of Agroindustrial Workers (SINTRAINAGO), killed by unknown assailants October 11 in Carepa, Antioquia.
- Medardo Cuesta and Oswaldo Cuadrado also from SINTRAINAGO received death threats on October 26.
- In October 2006, the Colombian government withdrew protective measures from Francisco Eladio Ramirez Cuellar, president of the Mine Workers Union (SINTRAMINERCOL), even though the protective measures were mandated by the OAS/IACHR.

**Religious leaders:** An August 2006 report issued by Justapaz and the Commission for Restoration, Life and Peace documents attacks against Protestant pastors, lay leaders and church members from January 2004- July 2006. The report describes 47 cases of death threats and attacks in which 29 people were killed. The perpetrators include paramilitaries, guerrillas and security forces. In but one example, Pastor Oscar Muñoz Perea was allegedly shot by paramilitaries in Buenaventura, after which some 35 members of his family fled after receiving threats (March 2).

**Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and "peace community" leaders:** The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) reports that as of October 23<sup>rd</sup>, forty-seven indigenous persons have been murdered in 2006, another 12 kidnapped and 29 others forcibly disappeared; 23 of these victims were indigenous political or community leaders.

- On August 9, five internally displaced Awá indigenous leaders were killed by heavily armed, hooded men in Altaquer, Nariño.
- On January 4, Ricardo Enrique Arias Solís and Celso Enrique Carrillo Guerrero, members of the Wiwa indigenous community, in Sabana Joaquina, La Guajira, were reportedly approached by men in military uniforms; the next day they were found dead, armed and dressed in uniforms, and army sources announced that two guerrillas were killed in combat.
- On August 3, Román Luis Vega Nieves was detained by army troops in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, La Guajira. The next day he was found dead, armed and dressed in a uniform; army sources announced a guerrilla had been killed in combat.
- The mostly Afro-Colombian communities of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó, Chocó, have received multiple threats in the past months, including a number directed at community leader Enrique Petro; former paramilitaries that have re-grouped are threatening the community.
- Amnesty International reports that on September 25, a group of 30-40 armed men, some of whom were wearing handkerchiefs across their faces with the words United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), arrived at a house near San Josecito, where the peace community of San José de Apartadó has resettled. These men allegedly had in their possession a list of names of members of peace community leaders and supporters they are planning to kill.

**Attacks against journalists:** According to Reporters without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists, three journalists were killed this year in Yumbo (Valle del Cauca), Montería and Cartagena. All were radio producers who reported on local government corruption, and two also reported on paramilitary activities in their area. The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that six journalists fled into exile during 2006, as of October 24<sup>th</sup>, due to threats. In addition to the email threats against media groups noted above, Hollman Morris, producer of the award-winning news program *Contravía*, has received several threats this year. In October and November 2006, paramilitary groups such as the "Black Eagles" have reportedly threatened with death journalists Robinson Ruz Ruz of Radio Piragua in Sincelejo and Jose Ponce Obispo and Camilo Munive of Radio Galeon in Santa Marta.