

21 July 2016

Colombia: Death threats against CREDHOS President Iván Madero Vergel

On 18 July 2016, Mr **Iván Madero Vergel** received death threats from an anonymous caller who explicitly warned him against continuing his advocacy work and said he would kill him unless he left the country in the next 48 hours. Later he received a text message from the same number, threatening to plant a bomb in his office. A colleague of the human rights defender also received a phone call threatening to kill Iván Madero Vergel.

[Iván Madero Vergel](#) is the President of the **Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Regional Corporation for Defending Human Rights, CREDHOS)**. CREDHOS is an organisation dedicated to denouncing human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law committed by paramilitary groups and members of the security forces, as well as accompanying victims and survivors, in the region of Magdalena Medio. CREDHOS has spoken out against the influence paramilitary groups exercise over Barrancabermeja and the various acts of intimidation and harassment targeting members of the Corporation. Iván Madero Vergel is a beneficiary of [precautionary measures](#) granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and protective measures granted by the National Protection Unit (UNP) of Colombia.

In the afternoon of 18 July 2016, Iván Madero Vergel received death threats from an anonymous caller. With extremely offensive language, the caller threatened to kill him if he continued to denounce human rights violations and gave him 48 hours to leave the country (*"perro hijueputa, malparido lacra te vamos a picar, te vamos a matar hijueputa, sapo siga metiéndose en lo que no le importa, siga denunciando, tiene 48 horas para salir del país"*). Almost immediately afterwards, the secretary of CREDHOS received an anonymous phone call asking her, also with very offensive and vulgar language, to warn Iván Madero Vergel that he should stop looking into peoples' past and that he had 48 hours to leave the country (*"oiga perra hijueputa, dígale al señor Iván Madero, que se deje de estar metiendo en lo que no le importa, que deje de estar esculcando en el pasado de las personas, que tiene 48 horas para largarse del país"*). Shortly afterwards, the human rights defender received a text message to his mobile phone saying that if he kept denouncing human rights violations they would plant a bomb in his office (*"siga denunciando hijueputa, siga recibiendo los sapos en la oficina, que le vamos a meter una bomba"*). CREDHOS immediately reported the incident to all corresponding authorities, including the police and the prosecutor's office.

This is not the first time Iván Madero and members of CREDHOS receive death threats. The organisation has seen many of its colleagues killed or forced into exile over the past decades. Front Line Defenders has reported several attacks against its members, including similar death threats to Iván Madero and his family on [25 June 2015](#), [23 June 2015](#) and [9 January 2014](#). On [25 and 26 November 2013](#), several men – who the organization believed to be paramilitary operatives tasked with monitoring the office - were spotted watching the CREDHOS headquarters building between 9am and 3pm. This incident happened only a few days after [classified materials were stolen](#) from the CREDHOS Barrancabermeja headquarters.

On 7 December 2012, spokesperson for CREDHOS, Mr [David Ravelo Crespo](#), was unfairly sentenced to 18 years and 3 months' imprisonment for aggravated murder, after a trial riddled with irregularities. The prosecutor who sentenced him, William Pacheco Granados, was removed from his previous post after an internal investigation determined his involvement into the disappearance of William Hurtado Parra in 1991. Additionally, one of the key witnesses in the trial was a former member of a paramilitary group who is currently being prosecuted for giving false testimony in

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another case. Despite calls made by civil society and international organisations to quash his conviction, David Ravelo Crespo has been in prison for almost six years for a crime he did not commit. Front Line Defenders has followed the case of David Ravelo Crespo since his detention in September 2010 and continues to call for his release.

There have been expectations internationally and domestically that the progress of the peace negotiations between the State of Colombia and the FARC guerilla would diminish the risk of harm for human rights defenders, however the opposite has been true. Colombia remains one of the [most dangerous countries](#) in the world for human rights defenders. Between January and March 2016 20 human rights defenders have been killed, which compares to 19 killed in the same period in 2015 and 16 in 2014. Front Line Defenders found Colombia to be the country with the [most killings of HRDs in 2015](#). According to Colombian civil society organisation "Somos Defensores", efforts to protect human rights defenders must consider the fact that in the last 5 years roughly 90% of threats were issued by paramilitary groups, who vehemently oppose the peace process. Organisations such as CREDHOS, that constantly denounce human rights violations committed by parties in the conflict and seek accountability for victims and survivors, face threats from all actors with vested interests in obstructing justice. CREDHOS is particularly at risk from paramilitary groups, as the Magdalena Medio region has been dominated by paramilitary groups since the mid-1990s.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the death threats against Iván Madero Vergel and his family members, as well as the efforts to intimidate members of CREDHOS against pursuing their work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Colombia to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the death threats against **Iván Madero Vergel**, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of **Iván Madero Vergel and his family members**, including through the full application of precautionary measures already granted by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights and the National Protection Unit of Colombia, in consultation with the human rights defender;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in **Colombia** are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 6 (b): *"Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms,"* and to Article 12 (2): *"The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

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Yours sincerely,

Mary Lawlor

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Executive Director

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