

More death threats against CREDHOS member David Ravelo

RAVELO AND OTHER MEMBERS OF CREDHOS HAVE BEEN TARGETED BY THREATS OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS. THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE MAGDALENA MEDIO CONTINUES TO BE CRITICAL.



David Ravelo, member of CREDHOS.

David Ravelo received various threats, communicated via his family, between May and July of this year. His son received several calls warning that they were going to kill his father and that he should be prepared for his funeral. In another call they told him that they had already murdered his father¹. They also told Ravelo's mother-in-law via telephone that there was an order to murder Ravelo². "They are targeting my family, where I am most vulnerable, in order to keep me in a state of constant uncertainty", according to Ravelo³. He is a member of the Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights (CREDHOS) in Barrancabermeja and has denounced innumerable cases of extrajudicial executions, murders, forced displacements and disappearances in the Magdalena Medio region. Over the past few years, he and other members of CREDHOS have received various threats by way of phone calls, pamphlets, and emails⁴. Ravelo is clear about the purpose of these threats: they seek to destroy the fabric of society, to weaken social organisations and oppress their members with the goal of removing them from the public realm. And they use death threats as a tactic to achieve those goals.

Since 2000, Ravelo and other members of the CREDHOS board have had precautionary measures granted by the

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Ravelo has three bodyguards and an armoured car at his disposal and recognises that this has helped him carry out his work to a certain point. However, he notes that protection cannot only be material support and emphasises the need for public and political help from State authorities in order to dissuade future attacks⁵. He recognises that PBI's work has been essential because "it acts as armour for CREDHOS. This armour is superior to the kind we have on our doors because it is a political reinforcement; accompaniment has allowed CREDHOS's work to grow"⁶.

The human rights situation remains critical in the region. The Human Rights Ombudsman emphasises that "during the past few months it has been public knowledge that threats and harassment of human rights defenders have intensified"⁷. The Human Rights Ombudsman also notes, "the primary risk [...] continues to be the presence of new illegal armed groups that have emerged after the paramilitary demobilisation". The Human Rights Ombudsman is referring to "Los Rastrojos" and "Los Urabeños", groups that, according to reports, are in the midst of a territorial dispute "for the control of the licit and illicit economies of the Magdalena Medio region, the drug trafficking routes (ports, transportation of chemical additives and coca derivatives), money laundering, extortion, and the theft of fuel"⁸.

There is a high cost for those carrying out public work in favour of human rights. According to Ravelo, there is a psychological impact that affects the nuclear family and one's surroundings, limiting social interactions, also causing health problems. Despite all of this, Ravelo and many other human rights defenders insist on supporting victims of the Colombian armed conflict because "we have something essential on our side: the truth. We persist in the noble cause of human rights".

ARREST AND SPECIOUS PROSECUTION OF DAVID RAVELO

On 14 September at 3pm, agents of the Technical Investigation Unit (CTI), a part of the Office of the Public Prosecutor, enforced a warrant for the arrest of David Ravelo issued by the National Public Prosecutor's Anti-terrorism Unit no. 22 in Bogotá⁹. Ravelo is charged with the conspiracy to commit a crime and aggravated homicide¹⁰. These charges are based on the testimonies of demobilised paramilitaries who testified in a hearing within the framework of Law 975¹¹. As a result of these accusations, David Ravelo presented himself voluntarily in the Public Prosecutor's Office no. 3 in Barrancabermeja in order to contend his innocence with his own testimony¹².

1. "Denuncia dirigida a la Fiscalía General de la Nación—Seccional Barrancabermeja, número de radicado 680916000135201000595", CREDHOS, 4 June 2010

2. "Acción urgente: Grave situación de riesgo del defensor de derechos humanos David Ravelo Crespo y su familia", Corporación Reiniciar, 28 May 2010, <http://www.reiniciar.org/?q=node/279>

3. Interview with David Ravelo, 15 July 2010

4. Ibid. 2

5. Ibid. 2

6. Ibid. 2

7. "Nota de Seguimiento", Defensoría delegada para la evaluación de riesgos de la población civil como consecuencia del conflicto armado, July 2010

8. Ibid. 7

9. "Privado de la libertad el defensor de derechos humanos David Ravelo Crespo", EETDDHH, 14 September 2010

10. Ibid. 9

11. Law 975 grants reduced sentences to paramilitaries accused of crimes against humanity in exchange for their confessions and cooperation in the judicial process.

12. Ibid. 9