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FBI COLOMBIA PRESENTS



Committee in Solidarity
with Political Prisoners (FCSP)

The Committee in Solidarity with Political Prisoners (FCSP) has the objective of promoting the respect and guarantee of the rights of persons deprived of their liberty for political motives. PBI has accompanied FCSP since October 1998 and its Medellín chapter since the end of 1999.



Beronika Gaross (PBI) and Flor Munera (FCSP).

Brief history

In 1973, the Committee in Solidarity with Political Prisoners was created by the Workers Trade Union (USO), the Colombian Federation of Educators (FECODE), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANUC), and the Popular Bank Workers' Trade Union (SINTRAPOPOPULAR). The Committee was born during a context when several USO members, who had been participating in an oil workers strike, were arrested and prosecuted by a military court. Additionally, during the Misael Pastrana Borrero government, the FARC, ELN and EPL insurgent groups were very active and many people were arrested. The small farmer organisation ANUC also encouraged land takeovers which resulted in many detentions.

In the beginning, FCSP would visit people imprisoned for political motives with the ongoing concern for the observance of their rights. Over the years, the Committee's work has broadened to include human rights promotion and education in several regions of Colombia in order to confront the different forms of political persecution. In this respect, FCSP has contributed to the dissemination of mechanisms to protect fundamental rights and to their appropriate use by communities.

Currently, FCSP has six chapter organisations in the departments of Valle, Antioquia, Tolima, Atlántico, Cundinamarca, and Santander, along with a support group in the Coffee Zone. Internationally, FCSP members have participated in speaker's tours in Europe and United States and carry out advocacy work before international bodies and foreign legislatures.

ACCORDING TO FCSP, SECURITY FORCES HAVE ALSO COORDINATED THE INITIATION OF LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THESE INDIVIDUALS, USUALLY ON CHARGES OF SUBVERSION, WHICH ARE NOT BASED ON SUBSTANTIVE EVIDENCE OR FULL AND IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATIONS

Description of the organisation's work

The principal areas of the organisation's work include prison assistance to people detained for political motives, legal assistance, research on prison conditions in Colombia, receiving and processing complaints, human rights education for prisoners, and organising public events for awareness raising and reflection on the previously mentioned issues.

The FCSP received formal recognition to enter prisons in 1991. The FCSP encourages the prison movement and belongs to the Senate Human Rights Commission in order to present and discuss policy proposals for human rights protection.

Objectives

The FCSP has the following objectives:

- Safeguard the respect and guarantee of the rights of persons deprived of their liberty for political motives.
- Achieve the improvement of conditions at detention centres and of protection measures for persons deprived of their liberty.
- Contribute to the prevention of human rights violations, the prosecution and conviction of the responsible parties, and the reparation of the victims.
- Engage in dialogue with national, regional and local State institutions to secure the adoption of legal, administrative and judicial measures oriented to achieving the guarantee and respect of human rights.
- Encourage the intervention of international human rights bodies to follow up on and evaluate the human rights situation in the country and to work with the national authorities in developing solutions to the country's humanitarian crisis.

- Promote international humanitarian law and strengthen awareness in communities on the obligations of the parties involved in the armed conflict to respect the rights of the civilian population and wounded or captured combatants.



Fernando Rodríguez (FCSP) and Evan Storey (PBI).

FCSPP HAS HAD PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES FROM THE IACHR SINCE 2001 AND SOME OF ITS MEMBERS HAVE MEASURES WITH THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR'S PROTECTION PROGRAMME

Risks and threats

Over the years, FCSPP has been the victim of threats, harassment, threatening telephone calls, surveillance, and even the murder of several members. The threats against the FCSPP owe to its representation of legal cases and its direct work with political prisoners —many of whom belong to insurgent groups—. The members of the chapter organisations have also reported surveillance, threatening telephone calls, threats from paramilitary prisoners, and written threats. Members have also suffered physical attacks as occurred in the beginning of 2003 when shots were fired at the car in which Humberto Torres, lawyer for the Barranquilla chapter, was travelling.

On 30 January 1999, two FCSPP members (Jesús Puerta and Julio Ernesto González) were murdered outside of Medellín and the FCSPP offices in the area had to close for four months due to the death threats accusing them of defending «the human rights of guerrilla groups»¹.

Since 2005, FCSPP has reported being persecuted by the authorities and paramilitary groups². According to the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, four FCSPP members (Alirio de Jesús, Javier Barriga, Julio Ernesto, and Everardo de Jesús), and another person from the support group (Luciano Enrique Romero), were murdered in Valledupar at the hands of paramilitary groups. Other members have been forced to abandon their homes and work. In fact, grave threats have even forced some members, including Dolores Villacop and José Humberto Torres, into temporary exile³.

According to FCSPP, security forces have also coordinated the initiation of legal proceedings against these individuals, usually on charges of subversion, which are not based on substantive evidence or full and impar-

tial investigations. These incidents have also affected the human rights defenders who are stigmatised, receive frequent death threats, and even murdered. On 5 August 2005, José Humberto Torres Díaz was cleared of accusations levelled against him in a military intelligence document which had come to the attention of the FCSPP⁴.

In April 2006, the FCSPP reported that Franklin Castañeda was the target of harassment by three unidentified men⁵. On 22 April 2008, members of FCSPP and the Central Union of Workers (CUT) in Santander⁶ received a death threat written by the paramilitary group «New Generation Black Eagles» of Santander. On the following day, José Humberto Torres received a death threat via email accusing him of being a guerrilla member. The threat, signed by a group calling itself «Black Eagles Rearmed», named FCSPP members María Cedeño and Nicolás Castro as people they were keeping under surveillance⁷.

On December 2009, the FCSPP learned that the Administrative Department of Security (DAS) had a file on the organisation, as well as another file specifically on its president, Agustín Jiménez. According to Amnesty International, the stigmatisation faced by FCSPP members coincides with the unsubstantiated claims made in a report prepared by the Army's First Regional Military Intelligence Unit, which had claimed that FCSPP secretary general Franklin Castañeda and José Humberto Torres were members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) in the city of Barranquilla⁸.



Andrew Hudson (Human Rights First) and Principe Gabriel González (FCSP).

Príncipe Gabriel González Arango

On 4 January 2006, officials from the Prosecutor General's Office detained FCSP member Príncipe Gabriel González Arango in Pamplona (Norte de Santander) under charges of rebellion. At the time, González Arango had precautionary measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and was included in the Ministry of Interior's Protection Programme⁹. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders described this detention as arbitrary and stated that the legal proceedings were related to his activities in defence of victims of arbitrary detentions, torture, mistreatment or infra-human conditions in the country's penitentiaries¹⁰.

On 4 April 2007, Príncipe Gabriel González Arango was released from prison after the trial court judge determined that the criminal prosecution was baseless and should have never been initiated. This acquittal was appealed by the Inspector General's Office and in March 2009 the Superior Court of Bucaramanga sentenced González to seven years in prison. The Prosecutor's Of-

fice relied on two witnesses: one who was unable to physically identify or name the defendant before he was detained and another who admitted to providing statements under duress¹¹.

Several international entities —including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, and the U.S. Department of State—have expressed their concern for the case against Príncipe Gabriel González. In October 2009, Human Rights First presented González with its annual human rights award in recognition of his «outstanding promotion of human rights». In June 2009, González appealed his case to Colombia's Supreme Court arguing that his conviction was void. In December 2009, he lodged a petition with the IACHR stating that his human rights were violated given the arbitrary detention and the ongoing criminal prosecution. González also requested precautionary measures from the IACHR to avoid a return to arbitrary detention.

Protection measures

FCSP has had precautionary measures from the IACHR since 2001 and some of its members have measures with the Ministry of Interior's Protection Programme.

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1. «Defensores se reúnen con Pastrana», Actualidad Colombiana No. 258, 3 March 1999.
2. «Colombia: Detención arbitraria del Sr. Príncipe Gabriel González Arango», Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, 13 January 2006. Reference: COL 001/0106/OBS 004.
3. «Fear for the safety», Amnesty International, Urgent Action 276/06, 11 October 2006, Reference: AMR 23/043/2006. The Humberto Torres's name appeared on a list belonging to a paramilitary chief from Barranquilla, which accused him of belonging to the ELN.
4. «Fear for the safety of José Humberto Torres Díaz (m), lawyer and human rights defender and other FCSP members», Amnesty International, Urgent Action 276/06, 11 October 2006, Reference: AMR 23/043/2006.
5. «Denuncia pública», FCSP Atlántico chapter, 25 April 2006.
6. Carolina Rubio, Príncipe Gabriel González, and María Cardona.
7. «Fear for safety/ Death threats», Amnesty International, Urgent Action 115/08, 30 April 2008. Reference: AMR 23/014/2008.
8. Ibid.
9. In June 2005, he received threats along with other FCSP members by the «Central Bolívar Block», which forced him to abandon his home. Previously, González Arango had been threatened and declared military objective by paramilitary groups in 2003 and March 2005.
10. «Colombia: Detención arbitraria del Sr. Príncipe Gabriel González Arango», Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, 13 January 2006. Reference: COL 001/0106/OBS 004.
11. «Colombian Activist, Victim of Arbitrary Detention, Seeks Urgent Precautionary Measures», Human Rights First, 11 December 2009.



Miriam Futterlieb accompanying members of the FCSP in Medellín.