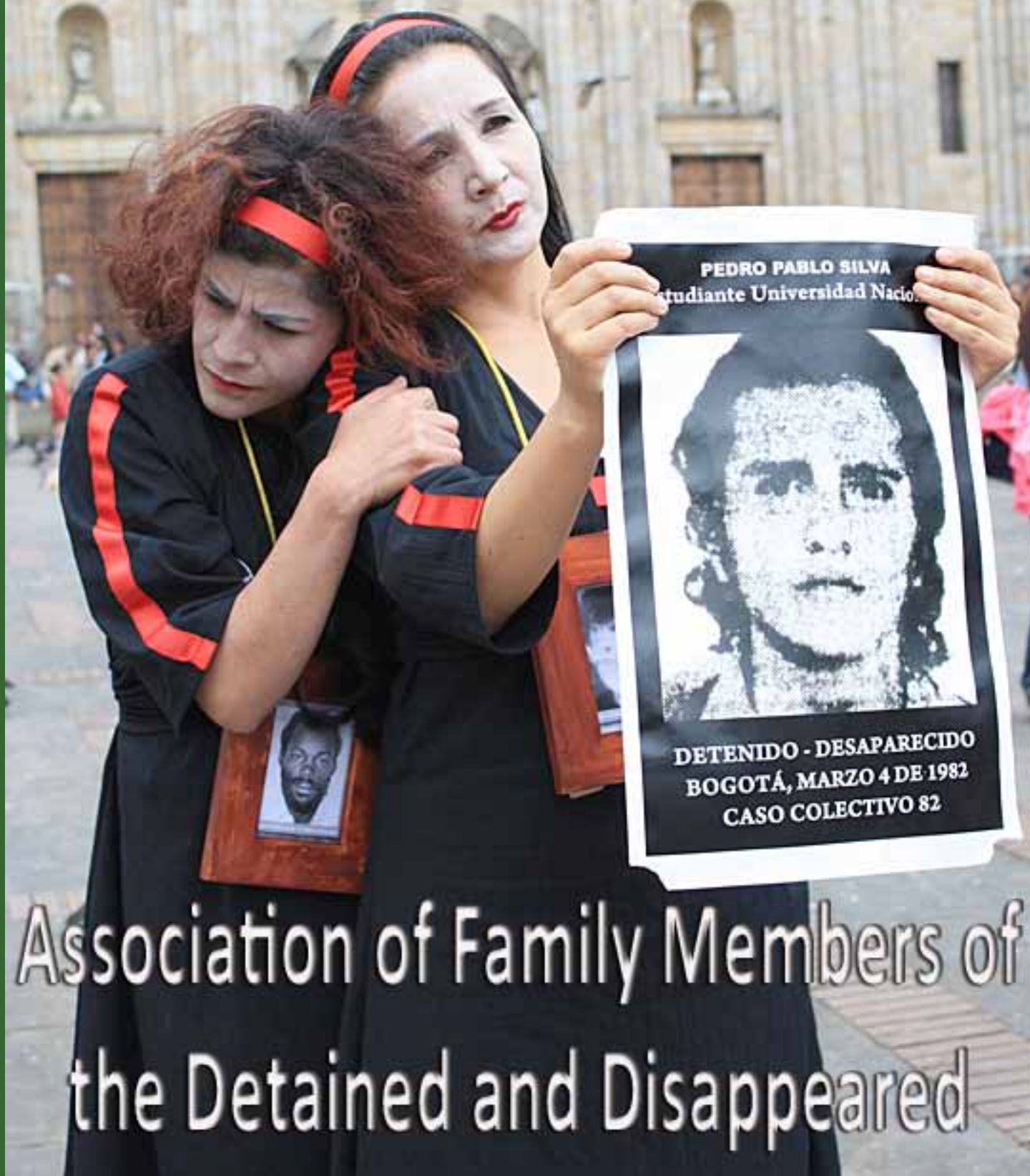


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# PBI COLOMBIA PRESENTS



Association of Family Members of  
the Detained and Disappeared



The NGO Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared (ASFADDES) has fought for the right to truth, justice and comprehensive reparation in Colombia since 1982. PBI has accompanied ASFADDES members since its arrival in the country in 1994.



Action against forced disappearance; commemoration in Medellín.

ASFADDES focuses its efforts on the fight against impunity and the eradication of the practice of forced disappearance. The Association also promotes legal and political mechanisms to punish the material and intellectual authors of this crime and achieve ethical, moral and comprehensive reparation for the family members and society by the State, as constitutional guarantor of human rights.

ASFADDES provides moral and physical accompaniment for the family members of disappeared persons as they search for their loved ones, speak out against the violations, and follow up on the cases before judicial bodies to establish the circumstances of the

method, time and place in which the acts occurred. Additionally, ASFADDES's work includes the examination of the bodies found as NN (No Names), in addition to the exhumation, identification and restitution of the remains when the victims have been found deceased.

The Association attempts to raise the population's awareness on the issue of forced disappearance through encouraging and supporting the organisation of family members. In this respect, ASFADDES provides spaces for education, legal assistance, psychological support, and the sharing of reflections and experience, in order to understand the repressive methods of forced disappearance. ASFADDES also seeks to find



## **ASFADDES ADVISES AND COUNSELS FAMILIES IN EXPOSING THE ABUSES AND SEARCHING FOR THE VICTIMS IN CASES OF THOSE FORCIBLY DISAPPEARED FOR THEIR POLITICAL OR COMMUNITY ACTIVISM OR THEIR COMMITMENT TO ACHIEVING SOCIAL JUSTICE.**

solutions to the emergencies faced by the affected families—including threats, forced displacements, murders, and forced disappearances, among other situations—.

ASFADDES advises and counsels families in exposing the abuses and searching for the victims in cases of those forcibly disappeared for their political or community activism or their commitment to achieving social justice. Furthermore, the Association provides families with psycho-social accompaniment and assistance through support from specialised organisations, such as AVRE Corporation (Support to Victims of Socio-political Violence for Emotional Recovery Corporation).

### **Coordination**

ASFADDES, a member of the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (FEDEFAM), has been inspired by the example of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo of Argentina—an association recognised throughout the world for its tireless fight to achieve truth, justice and comprehensive reparation—. ASFADDES also works in partnership with the United Nations Working Group on Enforced Disappearance. In Colombia, ASFADDES actively participates in the National Commission to Search for Disappeared Persons, which was established in 2000 with the purpose of «supporting and encouraging the investigation of the crime of forced disappearance»<sup>1</sup>. The Association also participates in the «Victims and Rights» campaign which seeks to visibilise «forced disappearance as a crime against humanity»<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, ASFADDES has six chapters in different regions of the country—Barrancabermeja, Medellín, Cundinamarca, Bucaramanga, Neiva, Popayán— and a national office in Bogotá.

«ASFADDES is the first and oldest victim's organisation in Colombia. We are family members of disappeared persons who have come together to work for Truth, Justice and Comprehensive Reparation. With respect to justice, we follow up on cases and organise victims, no longer only with the family members of disappeared persons, rather with victims of State-sponsored crimes»<sup>3</sup>.



**Action against forced disappearance commemorating the International Week of the Disappeared, organized by ASFADDES in Bogotá in May 2009.**





Family members of a person who disappeared in 1994 are waiting for the delivery of the body.

## Some figures on forced disappearance

The complexity of forced disappearance prevents having exact data on this crime. According to the different figures compiled by ASFADDES, the National Justice and Peace Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office, and the United Nations Working Group on Enforced Disappearance, from 15 thousand to 50 thousand cases have been reported in Colombia<sup>4</sup>.

### History

In 1982, the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared was born in Colombia after the detention and later disappearance of 13 people, most of whom were students from the National and City Universities in Bogotá. The family members of these victims understood the need to join together to search for their loved ones and achieve a response from Colombian authorities on the fate of those who

were detained and disappeared. In the beginning, the Association received support from the Jesuit priest Javier Giraldo and the lawyer Eduardo Umaña Mendoza (who was murdered in 1998), both renowned Colombian human rights defenders.

Due to threats, several ASFADDES presidents have been forced into exile over the years. On 6 October 2000, two ASFADDES members, Ángel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve, were forcibly disappeared in Medellín. The Metropolitan Police of this city were later found guilty for this crime. Every 6 October, ASFADDES pays homage to these two persons who were forcibly disappeared.

«The disappearance of Ángel and Claudia was the hardest and most difficult experience for us and for the rest of the human rights organisations in Medellín. It took us a year and a half until we carried out another event or activity in the street»<sup>5</sup>.





Catiane Vander Kelen (PBI) and Gloria Gómez (ASFADDES) in Popayán.

## Security and protection measures

Within the context of stigmatisation, persecution and false accusations against the human rights movement, ASFADDES has been directly affected by acts of harassment, persecution, murder and forced disappearance against some of its members. As a result, ASFADDES was forced to temporarily close six of their chapter offices due to the high risk for those at these chapters.

ASFADDES has provisional measures from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

## International accompaniment

Since 1994, PBI Colombia has accompanied ASFADDES's national board of directors —presently made up of Gloria Gómez (national president) and Esperanza Merchán (Secretary General), among others—. Addi-

tionally, PBI has accompanied the Medellín and Barrancabermeja chapters since 1999.

## Recognition

ASFADDES —as a human rights organisation— enjoys broad international recognition in Europe and North America. In 2008, ASFADDES actively participated in the International Opinion Tribunal on Forced Disappearance, as well as in the «Without a trace» International Seminar on Forced Disappearance.

## International awards

Family Members of the Disappeared and Detained for Political Motives. Argentina, September 1996  
Mutual Support Group – GAM. Guatemala, June 1999  
Torture Never Again Group (Rio de Janeiro chapter). Brazil, November 2005  
The Piece «Repose» by the artist Oswaldo Guayasamín Quilt - Amnesty International. Canada



## Published information

→ Javier Giraldo during the event commemorating 20 years of the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared, 20 March 2003, <http://www.javiergiraldo.org/spip.php?article36>

→ «Veinte años de historia y lucha, ASFADDES: Con todo el derecho», ASFADDES, Bogotá, 2003

→ «New Threats against the OFP, ASFADDES and CSPP», Focos de Interés, PBI Colombia, March 2009<sup>6</sup>

→ «Human Rights NGOs subjected to illegal intelligence operations. Abuses persisted over the course of several years», Focos de Interés, PBI Colombia, 7 July 2009<sup>7</sup>

→ «Members of CREDHOS and ASFADDES receive death threats», Focos de Interés, PBI Colombia, December 2009

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1. Law 589 of 2000, <http://www.asfaddes.org.co/fcomision.htm>

2. «No lo justifiques, haz lo justo hasta encontrarlos», Victims and Rights, [www.hazlojusto.org](http://www.hazlojusto.org)

3. Interview with an ASFADDES member, May 2009.

4. Ibid. 2

5. Ibid. 3

6. In this monthly letter, PBI Colombia reports on a letter sent by the illegal armed group calling itself «Black Eagles», which made death threats against several organisations, among them ASFADDES.

7. In this monthly letter, PBI reports on the illegal and systematic interceptions and harassment carried out by the Administrative Department of Security (DAS) against different human rights organisations, including ASFADDES.



Action against forced disappearance.