

I would like to thank the people that made this audience possible as the opportunity for me to be able to speak to you.

Throughout Colombia's history human rights defenders have been subject of persecution by the State. However, this situation has increased dramatically within the two presidential periods of President Alvaro Uribe, who systematically through public discourse, has disqualified the work of human rights defenders by labeling us as "terrorists" or guerrilla "helpers".<sup>1</sup>

Recently it has been discovered that the Administrative Security Department (DAS), agency that is under the direct control of the presidency, underwent a massive intelligence operation against human rights organizations and its staff, all of this under the full knowledge and participation of the agency's directives. The JOSE ALVEAR RESTREPO LAWYER'S COLLECTIVE, has been the organization most affected by the illegal and illegitimate actions of the intelligence agency.

The DAS directives illegally created within the agency a Special Intelligence Task Force, known as G3. The G3 had as main objectives: obtain strategic intelligence<sup>2</sup> in order to restrict and neutralize the activities of organizations or persons that are in "opposition to the government"<sup>3</sup>; prosecute the "targets" of their actions; get to know in detail and control their activities; discredit human rights organizations; carry out offensive intelligence and psychological war.<sup>4</sup>

In order to carry out these objectives the DAS did not limit its activities to only intercept the communications of human rights defenders. For example, members of the DAS created very detailed resumes that included, personal and intimate information, information about their homes and offices, phones, family members, friends, traveling patterns, financial state, psychological profiles, ideological affiliation, professional activities, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Labeling that has been made extensive to Supreme Court Justices, Congress members of the opposition, trade unionists, journalists, among other.

<sup>2</sup> As per the DAS, strategic intelligence consists of detecting risks and threats against national security, information that is delivered to the government (President and his Cabinet) in order for him to make policy.

<sup>3</sup> Opposition are considered to be Supreme Court Justices, Congress members of the opposition, journalists, human rights defenders, etc.

<sup>4</sup> It refers to actions that have as an objective to generate terror aiming at neutralizing and restricting the work of those that are considered enemies of the country.

They also developed surveillance permanent patterns,<sup>5</sup> they were able to access the protection measures taken in the offices and homes of the defenders, and were able to establish routine patterns such as travel routes<sup>6</sup>, infiltrated meetings and press conferences and organizations,<sup>7</sup>, they paid informants, illegally acquire the keys to the homes of at least one defender,<sup>8</sup> they took photos and video of people and places,<sup>9</sup> they obstruct international traveling,<sup>10</sup> they participated undercover in international events and seminars,<sup>11</sup> they labeled the defenders as being part of international conspiracy schemes against the government, they directly threaten our lives by sending funeral arraignments to our offices with the sole purpose of terrorizing us to stop our work. They did not have scruples to include in their activities our families, including our sons and daughters. All of these activities funded by “reserves expenses” budget of the agency.

International mission that have visited the country have also been subject of intelligence activities, such as the case of the visit to the country the then Nobel Peace Prize Sra Shirin Ebadi<sup>12</sup>, or the Inter American Commission mission presided by Mrs. Susana Villarán<sup>13</sup>. International organizations, cooperation agencies, and embassies were also subjects of espionage. It was also evident the need to obtain information in order to sabotage the work that we do for international organizations such as United Nations and the International Criminal Court.

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<sup>5</sup> It has been reported that the DAS went as far as renting apartments near the residence of the “targets” in order to have direct surveillance. Examples of which are the cases of Gustavo Gallon from the Colombian Commission of Jurists and Alirio Muñoz of the Lawyer’s Collective.

<sup>6</sup> These activities make us worry about possible attacks against our integrity and life. Both Gustavo Gallon from the Colombian Commission of Jurists and Reynaldo Villalba have been subject of such intelligence activities.

<sup>7</sup> The DAS infiltrated the Lawyer’s Collective with informants, with direct access to the target.

<sup>8</sup> This is the case of Alirio Uribe Muñoz human rights defender working for the Lawyer’s Collective “José Alvear Restrepo”.

<sup>9</sup> The defenders and their families have been victims of constant surveillance accompanied by photos and videos, even during vacation.

<sup>10</sup> The DAS through intimidation prevented the trip of an employee of the Lawyer’s Collective to the Hague, that had as objective to participate in the State Assemble of the International Criminal Court

<sup>11</sup> Examples of this is the World Social Forum that was held in Brazil.

<sup>12</sup> The mission organized by the International Federation of Human Rights, visited Colombia in order to evaluate the security conditions for human rights defenders.

<sup>13</sup> The mission has as objective to contact indigenous communities in order to follow cases that are known by the Inter American Commission.

The protection program for human rights defenders and trade unionists was used by the DAS in order to carry out their illegal activities. Through this program the DAS was able to acquire information, intercept the phones of the bodyguards and security team, monitored the activities of victims of human rights violations, and recruited as informants security personnel in charge of protecting us, etc.

Unfortunately the DAS has converted in criminal enterprise and a tool to terrorize. At the national and regional level the DAS acted as a dependency of the paramilitary groups or vice versa. As a matter of fact one of the agency's ex-directors, JORGE NOGUERA CORTES, has been indicted for his close links to paramilitaries and for creating and delivering a list to paramilitary groups of people to be assassinated, which was made effective and resulted in the death of several people in the list.

The President, the Minister of Defense and other public officials, have been calling "judicial war", the work that the organizations do in terms of denouncing and demanding justice for the systematical practice of Extrajudicial Executions<sup>14</sup>, and other human rights violations that involve members of the Colombian Armed Forces. Such discourse increases the risks of the human rights defenders.

All of the above indicated that in accordance with the "strategic intelligence", and the "targeting" of said strategy, for the Colombian government, human rights constitutes a threat and risk for the national security. An example of the extent of the problem; the DAS ordered the creation of a list identifying all the council members of Bogotá that approved for a class of human rights to be dictated in all schools of the nation's capitol.

We considered that the manipulated intelligence reports made by different State intelligence agencies,<sup>15</sup> have been the cause of the suspension of visas of human rights defenders by the United States government, this has restricted enormously their work as defenders. United States is a very important scenario for human rights work for several reasons: first, we developed a very important communication with different public officials, including the Congress; second, partner organizations are based in US, and finally the Inter American Commission is based in the United States, organization that all human rights defenders go to, to prevent impunity, condition that favors human rights violations.

For that reason I ask this audience that all necessary arraignments are made to restore the visas of human rights defenders, among them of my colleague, ALIRIO URIBE

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<sup>14</sup> Extrajudicial Executions badly called "false positives" consists in presenting as killed in combat civilian that are not part of illegally armed groups.

<sup>15</sup> All State Intelligence agencies (DAS, Army, Police and Navy forces) have been involved in threats and attacks against human rights defenders.

MUÑOZ, member of the Lawyer's Collective "José Alvear Restrepo", organization that I'm currently the President. .

The situation of the human rights defenders in Colombia is extremely grave. We require the accompaniment of the international community in order to demand from the Colombian State the end of the systematic persecution against defenders. The political will is the first requirement in order for the defenders to be surrounded with the necessary security guarantees for their lives and their work. The States that proclaim themselves as Democratic, have the obligation encourage the defense of human rights, instead of persecuting those who are working in such necessary and legitimate activity

Thank you very much.

Muchas gracias.