

The 'Jose Alvear Restrepo' Lawyers' Collective (CCAJAR) *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'Jose Alvear Restrepo'**



CCajar is an internationally respected lawyers' collective working on some of the most important and high profile human rights cases, domestically in Colombia, regionally with the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) and internationally, with the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Current work

CCajar is currently working on a number of high-profile cases, including the case of human rights defender David Ravelo, who was sentenced in December 2012 to 18 years in prison, despite irregularities and a lack of due process in his case.

CCajar has also represented the families of the assassinated political leader Manuel Cepeda Vargas, journalist Jaime Garzón, victims of extrajudicial killings, the Palace of Justice siege, and a number of massacres, including Mapiripán, La Rochela and Trujillo Massacres.

The Collective also work on cases involving alleged human rights violations by multinational companies against rural communities such as indigenous peoples, afro-Colombians and small-scale farmers.

Threats

Given that many cases of human rights violations implicate members who have held office in the higher echelons of the state, armed forces, and paramilitary groups, CCajar Lawyers face constant threats and intimidation. The rights of lawyers not to be associated with the cases of those they are defending are regularly ignored.

The lawyers face threats on a daily basis. In one recent example of this constant harassment, on August 4, 2013, the paramilitary group "*Los Rastrojos - National Urban Commandos*" declared a number of trade unionists and human rights organisations, including CCajar, as military targets, accusing them of "*attacking the good and noble intentions of the high government of Dr. Juan Manuel Santos for peace and democratic prosperity, and stopping the progress of multinational companies such as Glencore, Drummond, Pacific Rubiales, AngloGold Ashanti*". This is of serious concern, as threats such as this one appear to be aimed at discouraging human rights lawyers from making legal complaints against the activities of multinational companies.

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Alirio Uribe

Alirio Uribe has been fighting against corruption and impunity in Colombia since the early 1990s. His work has focused on investigating and prosecuting those responsible for political killings, disappearances and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Colombians

Sir Henry Brooke, a former British court of appeal judge describes Alirio Uribe as *'my legal hero'*.

In 2009, Alirio and his family were found to be among the main targets of systematic persecution by the DAS and other State intelligence agencies. The *Transmilenio Plan* targeted opposition politicians, Supreme Court Judges, Social Organisations, and members of the international community.

"What you must understand, is that this is not just endless pages of details about my movements and those of my family. People have died after appearing on those lists." (Alirio Uribe)

Protection measures

CCajar have been granted precautionary protection measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. After President Santos came to power in 2010, CAJAR requested additional security measures from the government, but received no response. In April 2011, the lawyers decided to hand back the armoured vehicles that had been assigned to them. After negotiations with the Government, the Collective resumed use of their protection measures, however, they assert that these measures are insufficient for their protection needs, given that more than 100 people work for the Collective and that together with their closest family members who have often been threatened in the past, we are talking about some 500 people.

In fact, CCajar place great importance on political measures from the Colombian State in support of their work. However, instead of guaranteeing protection for human rights lawyers, State authorities have on a number of occasions stigmatised their work, affecting the independence of the judiciary and increasing the risks for people who contribute to justice. Of particular concern were statements made in 2011 by the State authorities, stigmatising the work of Cajar on the Mapiripan massacre. In 2005 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found the Colombian State responsible for the 1997 massacre of 49 civilians by paramilitaries who had colluded with the Armed Forces. Several senior officials have made statements suggesting that human rights organisations representing victims have fraudulent objectives when reporting cases to international and regional human rights mechanisms, claiming that a "legal war" is being staged by the judiciary against the military.



Soraya Gutierrez

Over recent years, in addition to threats from illegal armed groups, human **rights lawyers also faced a campaign involving the gathering and use of intelligence against them** at the hands of the state intelligence agency, the DAS. This body was found to have held personal information on prominent human rights defenders, including lawyers and judges, such as personal information about themselves and their families.

In May 2005, the life of the young daughter of human rights lawyer Soraya Gutierrez was threatened when Soraya received a box by post with a bloody, decapitated doll and a note saying "you have a pretty daughter. Don't sacrifice her." Evidence found during the investigation into the DAS in 2010 suggests that this action was carried out directly by the intelligence agency.

* Information provided by Ccajar and reported by the Colombian Caravana UK Lawyers' Group, ABColombia and Peace Brigades International