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## COLOMBIA

### Re-armed paramilitary groups threaten and attack protestant pastors

At least ten Protestant pastors living in the northern Córdoba region of Colombia have come under threat from re-armed paramilitary groups over the past six months.

In some of the cases, attacks and threats have led to the forced displacement of the church leaders and their families.

In each case, men claiming to represent the Black Eagles, a paramilitary organization with a heavy presence in the area, have contacted church leaders to demand the collaboration of the pastors and their churches. When the pastors refused to cooperate, they were told they would be considered legitimate military targets.

In some cases, the threats have been acted upon. One pastor reported that he was kidnapped and beaten and another had a live grenade thrown at his home while he and his family were sleeping inside. CSW partners in Colombia, the Commission for Restoration, Life and Peace (CRLP), are calling on the government to address the increasing instability in the region. They point out that a number of similar incidents took place in the same region in 2007 and 2008. These incidents, which also involved threats and attacks on church leaders have apparently gone uninvestigated, despite multiples requests to local and national authorities.

The CRLP believes that this lack of official action has contributed to a culture of impunity and encouraged the paramilitary groups to increase their activities and intimidation of community leaders including pastors.

CSW-UK's National Director, Stuart Windsor said: "We are seriously concerned for the safety of church leaders living and working in the Cordoba region. We call on the UK Parliament and the European Union to urge the Colombian government to properly investigate these recent brutal incidents and to work to eradicate illegal armed groups in the region without further delay".

- The Black Eagles, which emerged after most paramilitary groups in the region turned in their weapons as part of a government initiated demobilization process, are apparently attempting to consolidate power on the local levels. The threats and attacks appear to be part of an effort to coerce pastors, many of whom are involved in community work and peace initiatives, into a cooperative relationship with the illegal armed group.

- According to the CRLP, there were 512 violent deaths in Córdoba in 2008, including more than six massacres and mass forced displacements. Although this was the highest number of deaths in the past eighteen years, based on the current rate, they expect the number to be even higher in 2009.

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