



9.14.2009

COLOMBIA

Pastor assassinated by presumed paramilitaries

A Colombian Pastor was assassinated in his home last Sunday by three masked gunmen. Forty-one year old Rafael Velasquez, pastor of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Marañonal, died instantly.

The attack took place on the evening of September 6, after a church service in a Montelibano hamlet. The armed and masked men broke into Pastor Velasquez's home and shot him dead in front of his wife and six young members of his church.

Paramilitary groups vying for power in the region are thought to be responsible for the pastor's murder. At least fifteen pastors in Córdoba have come under threat over the last six months. A number have been forcibly displaced as a result of the threats against them and their families.

The situation in Córdoba is part of a larger pattern of severe violations of religious liberty in Colombia. A new CSW report details systematic religious persecution in areas under the control of armed groups. Over 200 churches have been forcibly closed and more than 35 pastors have been assassinated in different parts of the country during the last three years.

CSW's National Director, Rev. Stuart Windsor said: "CSW wholeheartedly stands in solidarity with the family of Pastor Velasquez at this terrible time. Our thoughts and prayers are with them as we call on the UK Parliament and the European Union to urge the Colombian government to properly investigate this murder as well as the other threats against church leaders. We urgently ask the Colombian government to bring those involved in the resurgence of paramilitary activity in Córdoba to justice".

A new extensively researched Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) report detailing the extent of violations of religious liberty and freedom of conscience in Colombia, can be downloaded in English or Spanish by clicking [here](#):

Notes to Editors:

- CSW partners in Colombia, the Commission for Restoration, Life and Peace (CRLP), are calling on the government to address the instability in the region. Call CSW's press office to be put in touch with English and Spanish speaking CRLP representatives in Colombia.