



PRISIONERAS POLITICAS COLOMBIANAS
COLOMBIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS
HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE NOW!
INTERCAMBIO HUMANITARIO, ¡YA!
SOMOS REVOLUCIONARIOS, NO TERRORISTAS
WE ARE REVOLUTIONARIES, NOT TERRORISTS
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THE POLITICAL PRISONERS:

Political prisoners, a term that many Colombians are used to hearing but few acknowledge and many prefer to forget they exist. The political prisoners are those compatriots that for thinking differently are excluded and incarcerated for supposedly representing a danger to society. “Rebels”, “terrorists”, are a few of the names chosen by the Colombian government to call those people from different sectors of society and social classes who dare to think about a different type of country.

For years, we have seen how different sectors of society have been persecuted with different excuses--the fight against communism, against narco-trafficking, and now, against terrorism. First we were witnesses to the persecution and death of an entire political party, our UP (Union Patriótica*), then the repression against the campesinos for residing in rural areas where there was guerrilla activity and the government named them as “collaborators”, then against social activists, indigenous peoples and community leaders as well as students and teachers particularly those from public universities, (this is typical of fascist regimes).

*: Note: The UP was a party of the Left that included guerrilleros who were laying down arms to enter the political process. They won many votes in Colombia; however, more than 4,000 of their elected officials and candidates were systematically assassinated, forcing the UP to dissolve and the former guerrilleros to return to armed struggle.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

“The political prisoners aren’t terrorists;
We are people who struggle for peace, social justice and a new Colombia.”

National Women’s Prison
Bogotá, November 27, 2008

Senate of the Republic

Compañeras attending this important Session of the Day of No Violence Against Women, receive from us a heartfelt greeting that we send you from Pavilion Number Six of the Political Prisoners at Buen Pastor. We ardently desire that this report may serve as a denunciation of the political repression of women and as a call to you to take preventive and corrective measures so that never again may women be discriminated against and abused.

TESTIMONY 1.¹

I, Blanca Nora Bastidas Carvajal, am a woman of campesino origins. My parents, originally from Nariño, like many poor families, migrated to Putumayo, where, as settlers they began to clear the jungle and make their homestead in search of better living conditions. I came there when I was very little with my parents and I helped them to work on the farm. I remember that we used to sow tomatoes, beans, peanuts, bananas, yucca, corn, rice, and we also raised chickens and hogs, all for the family's consumption. We used to sell the little harvest of corn and rice that was possible to trade.

I have been in Putumayo most of my life, where I met the father of my two daughters and with him, also, dedicated ourselves to the work of agriculture. When I separated from him I became the sole provider for my two daughters and took on the role as head of the family, but I also assumed the care of my three little grandchildren, with my daughter already widowed at her age of 19 years. I went to live in Piñuño Negro and begun to work in hairdressing and managed to set up my own salon from which I received the income that I used to support my daughters and grandchildren. While in Piñuño Negro I took courses in nursing at the Health Center and through the decision of the Presidents of the 15 localities of Piñuño Negro I was selected as a member of the regional health committee.

Unfortunately, because of living in a region where there is the presence of guerrillas the inhabitants that live there have been permanently harassed by the public forces and we experienced our rights being breached regardless of our gender or age.

I have been the victim of two unjust imprisonments and for the same supposed crime: "Rebellion". In the first occasion, the 24th of April, 2006, police agents arrived at my beauty salon with a warrant to search my property and take me into custody. They told me that I was implicated in a guerrilla action in TTY, despite me not even knowing that place. Along with me they detained a teacher. A few months before, the police had detained fourteen residents from Piñuño Negro, among them three women, victims of the same process. The teacher and I were taken by an army Coast Guard vessel to Puerto Ospina. Those who detained us took us to a Marine Infantry ship and the next day we were transported by an Army helicopter to Puerto Asis. At the airport a police vehicle was waiting for us and took us to the local police station. Our families, neighbours and representatives of the Community Action Council of Piñuño made several calls to the police station to find out about our status but the police told them that they didn't have any knowledge about us. Then the neighbours and relatives requested help from the Red Cross and Human rights organisations. Only then did the police station admit that we were detained there. I was detained all day in a small cell handcuffed to the bars of a window and even when I needed to go to the toilet the handcuffs were not removed.

On the 26th of April, we were taken to the prison of Puerto Asis, which at that time was a mixed prison. At that moment they took us to a preliminary hearing where we finally heard about the charges. I was accused of the homicide of two soldiers that had been killed in a guerrilla action in TTY. Just to listen to such a charge I felt like the ground gave way beneath me and I couldn't stop crying over the desk for quite a long time. Those who accused us were two witnesses whose faces we did not see. Their names were Norbey Osorio and Neider Damian, I remember that those were the names. After the preliminary hearing the women that were at the mixed prison were taken to a new prison in which cells had to be paid for in the women's section.

Later the witnesses that accused us did not return to appear in court and after seven days of captivity we

¹ testimony collected by Lilianny Obando, Political Prisoner

were released and recovered our freedom. Then I returned to the village and continued working in my hairdressing salon. In 2007, I continued being a member of the Health Committee and was also affiliated with the Putumayo Campesinos Association that is affiliated with FENSUAGRO.

The 24th of February, 2008, agents from DAS (Administrative Department of Security) arrived at the Village of Piñuño Negro and began to take the people of the town and from the districts to the sports center. There more than 200 people were gathered together. They separated women and men into two rows and, after requesting their identification cards, began to arrest some people on the spot.

They stopped me near my house, where I was walking with my granddaughter. The agents of DAS never identified themselves nor did they show any order to search my house. Later they said to me that because I had a criminal record from the previous detention (from which I had been released) I was being detained. They took us all to the Marine Infantry vessel. We two women who were detained that day were put in one cabin and in the other, the 12 men. They had us there for three days, sleeping on mats on the floor. Our food was sent to us by neighbors from the village. Later they transferred us to Puerto Asís, Putumayo. All the detained are campesinos and the majority of us are affiliated with the Campesino Association of Putumayo-ASCAP, which is an affiliate of FENSUAGRO.

They kept us at the Puerto Asis battalion for two days incommunicado. Then they transferred us to the police station. Once there, human rights lawyers successfully freed us via a Habeas Corpus. We were released at about 11pm. I went to a house in the town along with one of the other detainees, Epifania Quiñónez.

Around two in the morning some men dressed in civilian clothing arrived banging at the door to detain us again, saying that they were from the police. They took Epifania and me to the police station and the next day took us to the airport and in a Hercules belonging to the Army, they moved us to Bogotá. They did not explain why. They took us as we were without clothing or anything else. Our accusers say that I am a nurse for the guerrilla only because I belong to the Regional Health Committee of Piñuño Negro.

In Bogota, they kept us in the facilities of DAS for some seven days. They only allowed us one hour of sunlight. Then the women were transferred to the Buen Pastor Women's Prison and the men to the Picota jail.

I want to denounce the way in which the Army and the Justice institutions pass ordinary people off as guerrilla deserters who then give evidence against the population in the same way that happened to us. Mr. Polo and his brother Edwin Murcia, their parents and their brothers were known as local farmers but they were passed off as guerrilla deserters to accuse us.

I ask myself, where is the seriousness of the public prosecutors and judges? Why don't they investigate first? A similar case involves the son of the couple Alfonso Lizcano and Teresa Leiva, who presented himself as a guerrilla deserter but we all knew him as local youth in the town. That is the result of so called informant's networks, and also of the rewards program and the "false positives"².

² "False Positives" is the term used for the wide spread practice in the Colombian military of detaining and/or killing persons and falsely claiming them to be guerrilla combatants. Most targeted are campesinos, the indigenous, and Afro-Colombians. Recently released documents show that the CIA has known since 1994 about the regular use of "false positives" and the "body count mentality" in the Colombian military and Uribe administration by measuring their success in the conflict with guerrillas by way of the number of corpses and detainees produced.

On 24th of November, 2008, I finished nine months since the moment of my detention, nine months under arrest with my legal situation unresolved, nine months since I was violently separated from my daughters and my grandchildren. I could not be at the birth of my younger granddaughter and today I am here suffering thinking about them as they were left abandoned. They have not even permitted me to have contact with my family by relocating me to a jail closer to where my daughters live.

During these nine months, due to our impoverished situation and the long distance, I have not been able to receive a visit from my daughters. Only on one opportunity my 16 year old daughter came to see me but because she didn't bring an original copy of her ID she could not enter the patio. We were only allowed a short visit of 25 minutes, after putting up with the humiliating treatment to which the guard submitted us, so much that she didn't even want to allow us to give each other a hug.

In my case, I hope that at least, while they resolve my juridical situation, they will give me house arrest so that I can be closer to my grandchildren and take care of them.

After all the persecution that I have been victim of, I fear for my security if I do return to my town and I also fear for the security of my daughters, whom I have not been able to relocate due to a lack of resources.

We hope that the Senators involved in the struggle for our rights as women can enact laws that in our case, as political and social prisoners, takes into consideration our role as single mothers who are heads of our families and allow us to be held in home detention while our juridical situations are being resolved or while we serve our sentences. Not to do so not only violate our rights as mothers, but also those of our children.

We also hope that today, the country may be informed that we are more than 7,200 political prisoners, that we are in the jails for our work organizing in our communities, for denouncing the outrages committed against us by the Public Forces, for thinking differently, or for the simple act of living in zones of conflict.

Sincerely,
Blanca Nora Bastidas,

Political Prisoner
(Testimony taken by Lilianny Obando, Political Prisoner)

TESTIMONY 2.

My name is Paola Ramírez. I am a student completing the third semester of a degree in political science at the National University of Colombia. Up until three weeks ago I was teaching at a college for adult education and, together with my partner, worked at an internet store.

On November 4 this year, I was captured with my partner Andrés Reyes (a community leader and systems technician) for the crime of rebellion as the result of an armed setup which located our names

on the supposed PC of a leader of the FARC.³

Despite having insufficient evidence and no criminal record, the prosecutor argued in our presence that we were not fit to live in society, that we were dangerous, and that we did not deserve access to those benefits that so many paramilitaries, murderers, thieves, narco-traffickers...that they have access to with incredible ease.

Is the danger we represent the fact that we study, teach or, worse, help our communities? No, the danger we represent is belonging to the opposition, studying and reading “prohibited books”.

It is necessary, or better said, urgent for the whole of Colombian society to become aware of this situation, that each one might think about how they could become the next victim and that it is urgent to put an end to this witch hunt so that at last a country might be born in which there is a place for everyone.

TESTIMONY 3.

Nov. 26, 2008-Bogotá DC RNM “Buen Pastor”

My name is Gloria Yaneth Calvache Vargas. I was captured on the 10th of February, 2004 at two in the morning in Peñas Coloradas “El Caguan” with 16 more people including children and minors, workers and a fifty year old sick woman, also the guerrillera Anayibe Rojas Valderrama - who goes by the name of “Sonia” - and another four guerrilleros. These armed people were there at our farm they came to ask for accommodation in the late hours of the night.

The capture was arbitrary, because the authorities treated us like guerrilleros and they took us out half-dressed, threw us to the ground, handcuffed us and placed their feet on our backs. They took us to the Battalion of Florencia, Caquetá by helicopter. There they psychologically abused us saying that if we would not collaborate they would kill us. I began to demand my rights and adequate treatment for the sick woman and they took me to a filthy bathroom and said to me that if I didn’t be quiet they would take me somewhere worse.

They moved us to the Bunker in the city of Bogotá. The treatment changed a lot—there was only one thing that displeased me, that was the visit of the DEA--they were gringos--and a woman translated what they were saying: “Collaborate”; and because we didn’t tell them what they wanted to hear they kicked a boy and insulted him.

On the farm they seized the coca base, which my husband had been given to guard. Practically all the people in this zone were living off this and the government knew all about that. I didn’t know it was there, since just the day before I had arrived from traveling. The case is that they condemned my husband to eight years for this crime. I was detained two years and four months.

³ The PC mentioned here would be the computer recovered that belonged to “Raul Reyes”, FARC commander and main negotiator for the release of FARC-held prisoners. The international police organization has said that the source of computer documents could not be authenticated and that the Colombian government’s handling of the computer evidence “did not conform to internationally recognized principles”. Furthermore, on Dec. 1st, 2008, Colombian Police Captain and anti-terrorist investigator, Ronald Hayden Coy Ortiz, who examined the computers while they were in Colombian custody, recently declared, under oath, that the computers did not contain any emails, only Word documents. However, it has been the supposed “emails” contained on the computer that have been used to place several opposition figures under investigation, including Liliany Obando, who collected these testimonies.

During this time that I was detained, my family suffered an intense persecution. They lived in Gigante Huila. The paramilitaries threatened them saying that they were helping the guerrillas and that they had information that a sister was being detained for being the wife of “Sonia’s” brother. My mother and my brothers were displaced together with my little brothers. My daughter was only six little years old at the time. The same thing happened to my aunt’s family. Without money and with only a few pieces of clothing, they didn’t have enough for a hotel. The children missed a year of education.

My despairing brothers traveled to Chaparral, Tolima with supposed friends and were disappeared (my two brothers, the wife of one of them and the husband of an aunt--there were four of them disappeared). My mother made a report to the attorney generals office and up until this moment, we haven’t had any information of their whereabouts. We have heard information through others that they were assassinated, but the bodies have not been found.

At the time I felt so powerless I didn’t know what to do. I spoke to the Director of the penitentiary-- Dr. Yeny Morantes. This worried her a good deal and she called the office of Derechos Humanos. I made the comment to them that, please, would they work with me to recover the bodies by means of the Red Cross or through another entity but they didn’t do anything.

This went on for three years. My mother and my aunt and also the pregnant wife of one of my brother’s, remained alone without any help and with minors under their care. This city remained very hard for them and they returned to Huila, of course this was another city because they are not able to return to Gigante (Huila). Being detained, I had some visits, on two occasions an Army Captain and another person in the army; I don’t know what rank he had. They told me that if I might testify against “Sonia”, that if I would do it, that an attorney from the United States would come to directly supervise my statement, take me out of the jail and take me and all my family to the U.S. to live and give me money to live very well.

What had happened was that they did not have proof to condemn “Sonia”, but if I made a statement against her it would be convincing proof because of me being her sister-in-law, and thus would condemn her to the maximum penalty. I responded to them that I could not do that because I never saw “Sonia” doing these things. So they were saying to me that I might say “That she used to buy coca and meet with Narcos in my house”.

This is what they asked me to say and I never saw such a thing. It seems that these are very low strategies of the government.

I left with time served in August of 2006, in order to avoid a trial since I found myself pregnant, I decided to accept charges. They gave my husband house arrest, with us enduring a very heavy economic situation. Then they captured my husband on the 19th of August, 2008 because they opened another investigation, saying that he is the replacement for his sister, Sonia. They set him up because the reality is otherwise. We don’t have anything to pay rent, not even for diapers for our baby. General Naranjo said in a press release that my husband was sending shipments of drugs to other countries and that he had wine cellars and hidden assets, and if this were true we would at least have money for a lawyer, but we don’t even have it for our children.

On the 15th of October, 2008 they captured me here in Bogotá, but the DAS didn’t have an arrest warrant. At the Paloquemao [Palo Quemado] police station, they wouldn’t take me because my capture was illegal. At the moment that they captured me they did not treat me badly, but when they took me to DAS in the truck, they called me a guerrillera and verbally abused me. I was at the DAS offices in Cundinamarca for two nights and one day.

I asked for house arrest because it was very difficult for my mother to be left in charge of my daughters because she has in her care two other minors and she can't count on the help from anyone. We don't have proper quarters and she has to work in order to subsist with my little brothers and my daughters. They denied me house arrest because, according to the judge, I have three daughters, one who is an adult, and two minors, and also they denied me because of an express legal prohibition. The truth is I don't understand these things much, but I believe that I have the right to be with my daughters and I don't know where the judge gets that I have an adult daughter. The two daughters I have are two and ten years old.

Despairingly, I asked INPEC (Instituto Nacional Penitenciario y Carcelario) to allow me to bring my baby of two years to the penitentiary to live with me and be able to offer her the love and attention that she needs, since several of my compañeras have their babies with them in this place. But they didn't accept it, saying that they canceled the Institute's contract with Family Welfare. I cried to them, I begged them, I implored the Director and the Sub-director, but it was in vain. I am struggling so that in the appeal to the judge he will reconsider me for that benefit of home detention. The truth is I need it so much for my daughters and my mother. My ten year old daughter is very affected by all this, since she has had to suffer two captures of her parents in her short life! This will irremediably affect any child of this age and the only crime that I have committed has been to be in love with the brother of a great guerrillera. Had it not been for the publicity that they gave her, perhaps they would not have been so interested in our case, but this has influenced it a great deal.

They condemned me to 160 months, or thirteen years. I ask myself, where is the reduction for accepting their charges and avoiding a trial and not continuing to expend the state's judicial apparatus? I think that this state is unjust and does not respect the right to human dignity.

Why is it so that a person is judged without evidence, such as "Sonia", and behind this act they are incapable of judging her here in our country?⁴ And do they really have the cowardice to use the possessive "US" in order to condemn her? And it is all the more grave, without evidence, to violate her rights as a person, as a woman, and as a mother.

Why now do they have to make use of a vile setup against her brother, without evidence, only because they pay corrupt people without morals to testify against the innocent person in order to be able to extradite and condemn? We, the political prisoners, also have rights to be with our children and the state might keep us in mind for the power to exercise our dignity with respect and humanity.

"Thank you for listening to me."

⁴ Sonia was sent to the United States to stand trial, rather than go on trial in Colombia. She was sentenced to 17 years, which she is serving in the US. According to a report by the Fight Back newspaper, "what took place in this courtroom today was anything but justice. This is a frame-up, pure and simple," stated Mick Kelly outside the D.C. courtroom. Kelly, who helps lead the defense work for another Colombian political prisoner, Ricardo Palmera, added, 'In the course of the trial the prosecution called on a band of professional liars to testify. There was the \$15,000-a month DEA informant, Rocío Alvarez. Then there were the tales of the retired Colombian National Police officer, Mauricio Moreno, who spoke of plots to sell cocaine to the paramilitaries and then steal it. And then there was 'Juan Valdez' whose testimony was a collection of lies.' During the sentencing hearing, defense attorney Carmen Hernandez pressed for a new trial. She cited the fact that the testimony of 'Juan Valdez' was completely discredited and this amounted to new evidence. She also pointed out that her interviews with the jurors after Sonia's conviction indicated that they were influenced by the 'Juan Valdez' testimony. Judge Robinson agreed that the 'Juan Valdez' testimony was dubious at best, but then he ruled against a new trial."