AAA Response to the Assassination of Hernan Henao

June 8, 1999

Doctor Andres Pastrana Arango
Presidente de la Republica
Palacio de Narino
Carrera 8 # 7-26;
Santafe de Bogota, DC
Colombia.

Dear Mr. President:

I write on behalf of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to protest the assassination of anthropologist Hernan Henao on May 4. Dr. Henao was a professor at the University of Antioquia. He was attacked at gunpoint by three unknown intruders during a faculty meeting and died shortly afterwards.

Professor Henao was director of the Instituto de Estudios Regionales, a university research center coordinating studies of conflict, community development, environmental policy, and cultural diversity in the region surrounding Antioquia. At the time of his death, Professor Henao was preparing to conduct research on the living conditions of the displaced populations of nearby Uraba. Professor Henao was committed to the application of anthropological knowledge to the solution of complex social problems.

Professor Henao is the seventh professor at the University of Antioquia to be murdered in the past ten years. We are concerned that this represents a trend of brutality to suppress the investigation of social issues by research scholars in Colombia. Increasingly, Colombian scholars who study social issues have come under paramilitary threat and attack. In a climate of unrestrained and constant human rights abuse, there is no room for scholarly analysis of social realities or the exercise of academic freedom.

The AAA urges you to undertake a thorough and swift investigation of Professor Henao's brutal murder and to ensure that the guilty parties be tried by the Colombian judiciary. We ask, also, that you demonstrate the government of Colombia’s willingness to protect researchers, both national and international, from attacks and threats. We urge you to sever the government’s ties between the armed forces and paramilitary organizations and to make a concerted effort to purge the military of those elements sympathetic with paramilitary groups.

Sincerely,

Jane H. Hill, Ph.D.
President

cc:  
Doctor Alfonso Gomez Mendez, Fiscal General de la Nacion, Colombia 
Doctor Rodrigo Lloreda, Ministro de Defensa, Colombia 
Honorable Juan Carlos Esguerra, Ambassador of Colombia 
Honorable Curtis Kamman, US Ambassador to Colombia
Honorable William Cohen, US Secretary of Defense
Honorable Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State
Honorable Paul Coverdell, Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, Narcotics and Terrorism
Honorable Christopher Dodd, Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, Narcotics and Terrorism
Honorable Elton Gallegly, House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Honorable Gary Ackerman, House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Honorable Christopher Smith, House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights
Honorable Tom Lantos, House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, Congressional Human Rights Caucus
Honorable John Porter, Congressional Human Rights Caucus
Honorable Constance Morella, Congressional Friends of Human Rights Monitors
Honorable James Jeffords, Congressional Friends of Human Rights Monitors
Honorable Daniel Moynihan, Congressional Friends of Human Rights Monitors