

PERU: Young poet detained for two months on terrorism charges, faces up to 20 years in jail if convicted.

BACKGROUND: The 20-year-old poet Melissa Rocío Patiño Hinostriza has been detained since February 29, 2008, accused of being an accessory to terrorist activities, stemming from alleged involvement with a leftwing political organization which the Peruvian government claims is linked to terrorist groups. Patiño denies any political affiliations and authorities have not produced any concrete evidence to back up the charges. She is being held in a maximum security prison with severely limited privileges, and faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Melissa Rocío Patiño Hinostriza, a poet and business administration student, is a member of 'Círculo del sur' (Southern Circle) poetry group in Lima and runs a poetry programme on radio. She was detained when returning from a conference in Ecuador organized by the leftwing political organization Bolivarian Continental Coordinator (Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana – CCB). Patiño was charged with being an accomplice to terrorism on the basis of her attendance at the congress of CCB, which Peruvian authorities claim is linked to terrorist groups in Peru and abroad. The poet has said her main motivation for attending was the chance to travel to Ecuador.

Patiño is currently detained in the Santa Monica maximum security prison in Chorrillos, Lima. She is being held with convicted criminals and is locked up alone in her cell for 20 hours a day without access to radio or television. She is said to be in low spirits and suffering from anxiety, which has caused health problems such as stomach pains, but she has not been provided with medical assistance or psychological evaluation. Patiño has not suffered physical abuse but there are fears of reprisals following an April 20th visit by her boyfriend, when he was ordered to leave after threatening to make a complaint about a prison guard's behaviour.

The case has attracted widespread media attention and support in Peru and internationally. A petition requesting Patiño's release to be presented to President Alan García has been signed by more than 1,000 writers and artists.

Additional information

- CCB is a public forum that brings together civil society organizations in support of promoting the 'Bolivarian revolution' across the continent (<http://www.conbolivar.org>). The congress, reportedly held with the knowledge and consent of the Ecuadorian authorities, attracted some 800 delegates from across Latin America.
- The authorities claim that the Peruvian chapter of the CCB is linked to the Peruvian Marxist rebel group Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA) and the Colombian guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).
- In the 1980s and 1990s Peru suffered a decade of violent conflict involving left-wing guerrilla groups such as the Shining Path and Tupac Amaru, during which tens of thousands of people died. Thousands were imprisoned on terrorism-related charges in the 1990s without due process or the right to a defence under legislation brought in by former President Alberto Fujimori (now on trial for corruption and human rights abuses). Among those detained were writers and journalists who became Honorary Members of a number of PEN Centres. Some of these laws were declared unconstitutional in 2003 following recommendations for reform by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights.
- PEN's records show persecution of journalists in Peru to be on the rise in recent months, with a high number of threats, attacks and trials. There have also been reports of threats against writers protesting about Patiño's case.

For a full list of Honorary Members, click on the following link:
<http://www.pencanada.ca/prison/HonoraryMembers.php>.

Appeals to:

President

Dr. Alan García Pérez
Presidente de la República del Perú
Jr. de la Unión S/N 1ra. Cuadra, Cercado de Lima, Lima, Peru
Fax: +51 1 311 3940

Email: messages can be sent to the President via the following link:
http://www.presidencia.gob.pe/cartas_presidente.asp

Your Excellency:

As a member of PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of International PEN, the writers' organization with 145 centres in more than 100 countries, I draw your attention with some urgency to the charges of terrorism against the young Peruvian poet Melissa Rocío Patiño Hinostrero.

Melissa Rocío Patiño Hinostrero is only 20 years of age, a poet and a student, currently detained in the Santa Monica maximum security prison in Chorrillos, Lima. She is being held with convicted criminals, and reportedly is locked up alone in her cell for 20 hours a day. She is said to be in low spirits and suffering from anxiety, which has caused health problems but she has not been provided with medical assistance or psychological evaluation.

I join my writer colleagues around the world in respectfully requesting that you order Patiño's release pending the investigation into the charges. Should the charges be founded, I trust that you will enable her to remain free pending trial.

If the charges are not substantiated, Patiño should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Yours sincerely,
[your name and signature here]

Please send copies of your letter to:

Minister of Justice
Dra. Rosario Fernández Figueroa
Ministra de Justicia
Ministerio de Justicia, Scipión LLona N° 350, Miraflores, Lima, Peru
Fax: + 51 1 422 3577
Email: informate@minjus.gob.pe
Salutation: Señora Ministra/Dear Minister

Human Rights Ombudsman
Dra. Beatriz Merino, Director
Defensoría del Pueblo
Jirón Ucayali 388, Lima-Perú
Fax: +51 1 426 7889
Email: centrodeatencionvirtual@defensoria.gob.pe

Embassy of the Republic of Peru in Ottawa, Canada
130 Albert Street, Suite 1901
Fax: (613) 232-3062
Email: emperuca@magi.com

Please send copies of your appeal to the following Canadian authorities:

The Hon. Maxime Bernier
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Lester B. Pearson Building, Room A-10 125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa ON K1A 0G2
Fax: (613) 996 3443
Email: maxime.bernier@international.gc.ca

Gwyn Kutz
Director, Human Rights Division
Foreign Affairs Canada
Email: gwyn.kutz@international.gc.ca

Robert Sinclair
Deputy Director, Human Rights Division
Foreign Affairs Canada
Email: robert.sinclair@international.gc.ca

Silvia Genereux
Policy Analyst, South America Division
Foreign Affairs Canada
Email: silvia.genereux@international.gc.ca