

Andean Report by Valerie Rush and Carlos Wesley

Colombia defeats terrorists

A national demonstration—with international support—forced kidnapers to release the president's brother.

Jaime Betancur Cuartas, the brother of Colombia's President Belisario Betancur, was released unharmed on Dec. 7 from a three-week kidnapping by members of the National Liberation Army (ELN), a terrorist group linked to Colombia's powerful drug mafia.

The ELN was forced to release Betancur by the mobilization of the population of Colombia in support of his brother's government. The kidnapping was an attempt to split and bring down the government, and end the effective war on drug production and export President Betancur has waged since he took office in 1982.

The ELN dared to kidnap Jaime Betancur, the former head of the Council of State, because they were gambling on rallying popular support for their "cause" with demands for wage increases for agricultural workers and freedom for "political prisoners."

The terrorists' move backfired. The response of the Colombian population—and of foreign governments and international organizations—was to denounce the kidnapping and the ELN's demands, and to call an international day of protest to back President Betancur in his fight against drugs and terrorism.

Jaime Betancur was released on the day that Colombia's civic, political, and religious organizations had set as a national day of demonstrations "for peace and against violence." With the release, the protest turned into a celebration. Precisely at 12 o'clock the nation stopped work, record stores

played the national anthem, churches rang their bells, and people took to the streets. In the capital city of Bogotá, organized labor held a march at the Plaza de las Nieves, and the city's taxi drivers association sent their cabs into the street trailing white banners. People waved white handkerchiefs from almost every window in the city. That evening, the citizens of the country's second largest city, Medellín, marched in a torchlight parade organized by the Catholic Archdiocese.

In Bogotá, members of the Andean Labor Party, the Colombian Anti-Drug Coalition, and the Club of Life, held a rally where the speakers told those assembled that the President's brother had helped to save the nation during his earlier tenure as head of the Council of State. They cited Jaime Betancur's leading role in the fight against the attempts of the drug-linked former President Alfonso López Michelsen to alter the constitution to permit the free flow of drug monies in Colombia.

The international Club of Life and Anti-Drug Coalitions had organized support for the Colombian demonstration in North and South America and Europe. A statement issued Dec. 5 by president of the International Club of Life Helga Zepp-LaRouche pointed to the "unrelenting war on the drug mafia" which President Betancur has waged since he came to power, and called on the governments and peoples of the world to join in two minutes of silence to coincide with the Colombian protest. Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche cited the political power being exer-

cised by the population's willingness to stand up to the terrorists, which was creating the opportunity to expand the demonstration into an international protest against all terrorism.

The Club of Life's Venezuelan chapter went to the Colombian embassy in Caracas and joined the diplomats and their families in the two minutes of silence. In Mexico City, some 40 members of the Club of Life held a demonstration of support in front of the Colombian embassy, after which the leaders of the group met with the ambassador, who thanked the Club and said that he hoped it would continue to hold such demonstrations.

The Club of Life organized support demonstrations for the Colombian anti-terrorism fight in U.S. and European cities. Rallies were held in cities including Hamburg, Hanover, and Düsseldorf in West Germany, and the Swedish and Italian Anti-Drug Coalitions sent delegations to the Colombian embassy to join in the two minutes of silence.

The forced release of Jaime Betancur was a victory for the Colombian war on drugs. Both the ELN, which has rejected every offer to negotiate made by the government under a program of amnesty for the guerrillas that plague the country, and former Liberal Party presidents López Michelsen and Turbay Ayala, who held a congress of their faction of the Liberal Party Dec. 2 to denounce Betancur "for failing in his promises to the people," have lost credibility with Colombians.

Soon after, the Lopez-Turbay group demanded controlling power in Betancur's cabinet for members of their faction, under a law requiring representation for the party that comes in second in the elections. This would force the ouster of Justice Minister Lara Bonilla, a leader of the war on drugs.