



Yessika Hoyos Morales, Colombian Human Rights Activist

Yessika Hoyos Morales was born in Fusagasugá, Colombia, located 64 kilometers from Bogotá. Daughter of two well known unionists in Colombia- her mother Betty, a teacher and leader of the teachers' union in the capital province of Cundinamarca and her father Jorge Darío- once the Latin American representative for the International Federation of Miners and head of the Area of Education for the Andean Countries at the International Federation of Workers in Plantations, Agricultural Enterprises and the Like (FITPAS). Jorge Darío was also the founder of and advisor to some of the country's largest trade unions: the Colombian Federation of Teachers, the National Union of Bank Employees, the Telecom Union, and the Coal Industry Union.

On March 3, 2001, what is now seen as an emblematic case showing Colombia's ongoing violence against trade unionists, Yessika's father was murdered by two members of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) hired by a second lieutenant of the National Police Force.

While Yessika's family was still mourning the loss of her father, her family began to receive anonymous threats and their home was raided on more than one occasion. Continuous harassment became a part of their everyday life, but once they began to get followed, they decided to move to Bogotá. Even while in exile in Bogotá, the threatening phone calls never stopped. Yessika, her mother and younger sister moved a total of five times in almost two years.

While Yessika was finishing her third year of law school, in 2003 she began to work for the Corporación Colectivo de Abogados Jose Alvear Restrepo (CCAJAR), a renowned human rights law firm who also handles her father's assassination case. After graduating law school, Yessika continued with CCAJAR and joined the team of lawyers handling her father's case.

In July 2007, Yessika co-founded of the organization Sons and Daughters Against Impunity and for the Memory of the Fallen. The organization is composed of children of victims of disappearance, torture, exile, and murder in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and other Latin America countries.

On February 12, 2009, Yessika was one of three witnesses who testified before the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor organized by committee chairman Representative George Miller (D-CA). The February 12 hearing, *Examining Workers' Rights and Violence against Labor Union Leaders in Colombia*, focused on the more than 2,700 deaths of union members in the past two decades and the high level of impunity that still remains.

Ms. Hoyos is the recipient of the 2008 AFL-CIO's George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights award and will be receiving it later this September in Pittsburgh.