

URGENT ACTION

PARAMILTARIES THREATEN TRADE UNIONISTS

Trade unions, human rights organizations and community leaders received a death threat from the paramilitary Popular Revolutionary Antiterrorist Army of Colombia (AU-ERPAC) in a flyer distributed in the municipality of Bugalagrande, south-western Colombia on 16 February.

On 16 February, an event had been arranged to raise awareness about the victims of paramilitaries in Bugalagrande Municipality. Whilst this event was taking place, flyers accusing several trade unions, trade unionists and human rights organizations of being guerrillas and threatening to kill them were distributed. The flyers had the following message: *"We warn you guerrillas of the FARC and ELN linked to SINALTRAINAL, SINTRAMUNICIPIO, ACACEVA and other NGOS your time has come bastards... You are not going to save yourself Rafael Esquivel, Fredy Sepúlveda, Álvaro Varela and Martín Agudelo and terrorist ideologist guerrilla partners that are travelling outside, we are waiting for you"* The individuals mentioned above are members of the National Union of Food Industry Workers (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos, SINALTRAINAL). In recent years, members of SINALTRAINAL have faced repeated death threats and killings as a result of their campaigns for trade union rights and for denouncing human rights violations against the union's members. Those SINALTRAINAL members mentioned in the flyer have in the past travelled abroad as part of their campaign work.

In addition to SINALTRAINAL, leaders of the union representing municipal workers, SINTRAENTEDDIMCCOL, were also threatened. Over recent years leaders of this union and its predecessor organization SINTRAMUNICIPIO have been frequently the target of serious human rights violations. The Peasant Farmer Association of the Centre of Valle (Asociación Campesina del Centro del Valle, ACACEVA) was also named in the flyer despite the fact that it no longer exists. This organisation was disbanded due to paramilitary violence. Some of its previous members, including former founder Luz Marina Palacio Bocanegra, are now part of the Association for the Integral Social Development (Asociación para el desarrollo social integral, ECATE), which works with victims of paramilitary violence, and they have received intimidating phone calls in the last few months. The flyers explicitly threatened three organizations and nine individuals.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into the death threats against members of SINALTRAINAL, SINTRAENTEDDIMCCOL and ECATE; to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Demanding that they provide protection for those threatened, as agreed with those in danger;
- Urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 APRIL 2011 TO:

President

Juan Manuel Santos
Señor Presidente Juan Manuel Santos
Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 337 5890 (works in office hours; Colombia is GMT-5)
Salutation: Dear President Santos/

Excmo. Sr. Presidente Santos

Minister of Interior and Justice

Señor Germán Vargas Lleras
Ministerio Del Interior y De Justicia
Carrera 9a. No. 14-10, Bogotá
Colombia

Fax: +57 1 599 8961

Salutation: Dear Minister Vargas
/Estimado Sr. Ministro Vargas

And copies to:

SINALTRAINAL
Carrera 15 # 35 – 18
Bogotá, Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Trade unions, human rights organizations, and other social organizations have often been labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by government officials, as well as by the security forces and paramilitaries. Such accusations have often been followed by threats or attacks against human rights activists. Colombia is one of the countries with the highest rate of killings of trade unionists – in 2010 51 members of trade unions were killed.

Colombia's paramilitary groups supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003, but it is clear from the threats against human rights organizations and trade unions, in Valle de Cauca and elsewhere, that they are still operating.

Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for numerous killings and threats in South-western Colombia in recent years.

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