

PUBLIC

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27 June 2008

UA 188/08

Fear for safety/Death Threats

COLOMBIA

Members of two trade unions:

the Association of Professional and Technical Workers of Companies of the Petroleum Industry of Colombia (*Asociación de Directivos Profesionales y Técnicos de Empresas de la Industria del Petróleo de Colombia, ADECO*)
and the Oil Workers' trade union (*Unión Sindical Obrera, USO*)

Members of four non-governmental organizations:

the Popular Womens' Organization, (*Organización Femenina Popular, OFP*)
the Regional Human Rights Committee (*Comité Regional por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, CREDHOS*)
the Peasant Farmers' Association of the Cimitarra River Valley (*Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra, ACVC*);
and the Association of Displaced Persons Settled in the Municipality of Barrancabermeja, (*Asociación de Desplazados Asentados en el Municipio de Barrancabermeja ASODESAMUBA*)

A paramilitary group has circulated a written death threat targeting the six organizations named above: two trade unions and four non-governmental organizations (NGOs). All six organizations work in the city of Barrancabermeja in Santander Department. The lives of members of these organizations are in danger.

On 18 June, a written death threat signed by the United Black Eagles of Colombia (*Águilas Negras Unidas de Colombia*), was delivered to the offices of CREDHOS by an unknown man. It accuses the six organizations of being guerrilla sympathizers and of promoting and financing guerrilla groups. It names all six organizations as "military targets" (*objetivo militar*). It says, "Once again we are being overrun with lowly guerrillas who ... want to take control of the city in order to return to the old days when they only had extortions, assassinations, union workers, and NGOs at their service, to fulfil their revolutionary ends and, through this, look for ways to destabilize the State." (*Que una vez mas nos estamos llenando de guerrilleros rasos, que ... quieren tomar el control de la ciudad para volver a los tiempos en los cuales solo habían extorsiones, asesinatos, sindicalistas y ongs a su servicio, para colmar sus fines revolucionarios y con esto buscar la desestabilización del estado.*)

The death threat follows complaints by human rights organizations that, in recent weeks, armed and hooded Black Eagles paramilitaries have been patrolling at night in two Barrancabermeja neighbourhoods, the Comunas 3 and 7, despite the fact that the city is heavily militarized. The security forces have reportedly denied that illegal armed groups are present in the city.

This is not the first time that these organizations have received death threats from paramilitary groups, who have long operated with the acquiescence and support of the security forces. In February 2008, the Secretary General of the Regional Human Rights Committee (*Comité Regional por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, CREDHOS*) was informed that paramilitaries were planning an attempt on his life (see UA 52/08, AMR 23/008/2008, 26 February 2008). On 6 November 2007, Amnesty International reported that the Popular Womens' Organization, (*Organización Femenina Popular, OFP*) had been threatened by the paramilitary group, the Black Eagles, and that the president of the OFP had subsequently been attacked in her home by unknown armed assailants (see UA 294/07, AMR 23/042/2007, 6 November 2007).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In Colombia's 40-year-old armed conflict, human rights organizations are frequently labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and paramilitary groups. As a result they often suffer threats, enforced disappearance or killings. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders they consider to be siding with their enemies.

Colombia's paramilitary groups have supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process. The threats against social activists and human rights organizations in Barrancabermeja and other parts of the department of Santander show that paramilitaries continue to operate there despite this supposed demobilization.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to do everything necessary to protect members of trade union organizations: ADECO and USO; and non-governmental organizations: OFP, CREDHOS, ACVC and ASODESAMUBA in the department of Santander, in accordance with their own wishes;
- calling on them to order full and impartial investigations into the death threat received on 18 June, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on them to take decisive action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups and investigate and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations;
- calling on the authorities to produce policy and plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders, to guarantee their safety according to the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and to make these plans public.

APPEALS TO:

President

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 337 5890

Salutation: Dear President Uribe/Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe

Governor of Santander Department

Sr. Horacio Serpa Uribe, Gobernador del Departamento de Santander

Gobernación de Santander, Calle 37, No. 10-30, Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Fax: +57 7 633 98 89

Salutation: Dear Governor Serpa/Sr. Gobernador Serpa

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C, Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Fiscal/Dear Mr Iguarán

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

Organización Femenina Popular,

Cra 22 No 52B – 36, Barrancabermeja,

Santander, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 August 2008.