

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety / Death Threats

16 Februa

COLOMBIAOrlando OSPINA LOAIZA]trade union leaders

Carlos Alberto FLOREZ LOAIZA]

And other trade unionists with SINTRAEMSDES, Pereira branch

Trade unionists in the central Colombian department of Risaralda have received a written death threat from army-backed paramilitaries. This is the latest in a series of threats, and Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

On the morning of 12 February, a card of condolences was delivered to the offices of *El Sindicato de Trabajadores y Empleados de Servicios Públicos* (SINTRAEMSDES), Union of Public Service Workers and Employees, in Pereira, expressing sympathy with the bereaved. It was addressed to the national board of SINTRAEMSDES, and carried the initials of Vice-president Orlando Ospina Loaiza, Secretary General Carlos Alberto Florez and the *Junta Directiva Pereira*, board of the Pereira branch. It was signed by the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia.

In recent weeks, the SINTRAEMSDES-Pereira offices and the home of one union leader have regularly been kept under surveillance. For example, two unidentified men sat on their motorcycles outside the home of union treasurer Ivan Velasquez during the night of 13 February.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The security and armed forces and their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. The people they accuse are frequently harassed, tortured and killed, often by paramilitaries. During 2000, 112 trade union leaders and members were murdered. In December 2000, a leading trade union leader, Wilson Borja Díaz, had to flee Colombia after he was shot and wounded by gunmen (see UA 387/00, 21 December 2000). Several active and retired police have been linked to the attack by judicial investigations. On 15 February, 25 unionists affiliated to the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Trade Union Confederation, occupied the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in protest at the threats, harassment and persecution that trade unionists continue to be subjected to.

Amnesty International has documented systematic persecution of trade unionists in Colombia. Seven trade union leaders were shot dead during the 1998 national strike, including CUT Vice-president Jorge Ortega Garcia (see UA 274/98, AMR 23/80/98, 21 October 1998, and follow up, AMR 23/90/98, 24 November 1998). None of these crimes has been resolved and those responsible have never been brought to justice.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in SPANISH or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Orlando Ospina Loaiza, Carlos Alberto Florez and other union activists with the Periera branch of SINTRAEMSDES following recent threats;
- asking the authorities what measures they are going to take to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- urging for an independent, impartial and conclusive investigation to be carried out into the threats with those responsible brought to justice;

- urging that the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No.7-26
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Minister of Interior

Señor Humberto De La Calle
Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Palacio Echeverry
Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o., Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 341 9583 / 334 3960

Salutation:Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Minister of Labour and Social Security

Ministro de Trabajo y Seguridad Social
Angelino Gárzon
Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social
Carrera 7 N°34-50
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: +57 1 285 7091

Tx: 45445 MITRA CO

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

SINTRAEMDES
Calle 35# 5b - 09 3er piso,
Pereira, Risaralda
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 30 March 2001.