

PUBLIC

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21 June 2006

UA 174/06      Fear for safety

COLOMBIA      **Alvaro Mercado (m), a leader of SINTRAMINERGETICA trade union**  
**Estivenson Avila (m), SINTRAMINERGETICA activist**  
**Rubén Morrón (m), SINTRAMINERGETICA branch leader**  
**Other members of SINTRAMINERGETICA**

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Gunmen believed to be army-backed paramilitaries have reportedly attempted to kill one of the leaders of a trade union whose members working for a coal mining company operating in the northeast of the country are on strike.

Alvaro Mercado is one of the leaders of the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Empresas Mineras y Energéticas* (SINTRAMINERGETICA), National Mining and Energy Workers' Union. On 13 June, gunmen travelling on a motorcycle opened fire on him as he was going into his house, in the Villa del Rosario area of Valledupar, department of Cesar. Police reportedly arrested the gunmen a few hours later and handed them over to the *Fiscalía General de la Nación*, Office of the Attorney General, but all were subsequently released.

Later that day, witnesses saw men they recognised as paramilitaries going to the house of SINTRAMINERGETICA activist Estivenson Avila in Valledupar. When they did not find him there they left. On 6 and 8 June, witnesses reportedly saw more men they thought were paramilitaries searching for SINTRAMINERGETICA branch leader Rubén Morrón at his home in Barranquilla, department of Atlántico.

SINTRAMINERGETICA members working for the Drummond mining company have been on strike since 22 May, demanding improvements in their working conditions. Alvaro Mercado is acting as a spokesperson for the union, and Estivenson Avila as a negotiator. Rubén Morrón is a leader of the SINTRAMINERGETICA branch in Chiriguáná, in the department of Cesar.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Paramilitary forces operating with the support and acquiescence of the security forces have been responsible for the vast majority of killings and threats against trade unionists in recent years. Human rights violations against trade unionists repeatedly occur in the course of labour disputes and are considered to be designed to undermine legitimate trade union activity. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for killing and threatening of trade unionists.

On 27 March SINTRAMINERGETICA trade unionists began negotiating improvements to their working conditions with Drummond representatives. As they prepared to begin these negotiations, they began being targeted for sustained intimidation, and at least one was killed. On 25 March SINTRAMINERGETICA activist Harvey Jovanny Morales Guevara was reportedly killed by gunmen in the centre of the city of Santa Marta, Atlántico department, as he was on his way home. Trade union activists believe he was killed to intimidate them as they prepared to present their demands. On 29 April, a local police commander reportedly accused SINTRAMINERGETICA members of being guerrillas, at a trade union demonstration in the municipality of Paso, Cesar department. On 1 May, after a march in the municipality of La Loma, Cesar Department, the vehicle in which the president of the Chiriguáná branch of SINTRAMINERGETICA, Raúl Sosa Avellaneda, was travelling was reportedly followed by gunmen travelling in several vehicles. Witnesses recognised the men in at least one of the vehicles as paramilitaries. Reportedly the paramilitaries stopped following them after the trade unionists reported to a military checkpoint that they were being followed.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Alvaro Mercado, who reportedly escaped an attempt on his life on 13 June, Estivenson Avila, Rubén Morrón and other SINTRAMINERGETICA members involved in strike action;
- urging the authorities to take effective action, deemed appropriate by the SINTRAMINERGETICA members themselves, to protect them so they may continue their legitimate trade union activities.
- calling on the Colombian authorities to ensure that full and impartial investigations are undertaken into the attempt on Alvaro Mercado's life and possible attempts to kill Estivenson Avila and Ruben Morrón, allegedly by army-backed paramilitaries.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: +57 1 337 5890**

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

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, Ministro del Interior y de Justicia, Ministerio del Interior, Av. Jiménez No 8-89, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: +57 1 560 4630**

**Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro**

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Iguarán, Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación, Diagonal 22B 52-01, Edificio C Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: +57 1 414 9108**

**Salutation: Dear Dr Iguarán / Estimado Dr. Iguarán**

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental human rights organization

Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz, Calle 50, No13-19, Oficina 203, Bogotá, 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 2 August 2006.