

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 154/94 Death Threats / Fear for Safety

18 April 1994

COLOMBIA Threats and attacks against members of the *Asociación de Educadores del Arauca (ASEDAR)*, the Teachers' Association of Arauca department, including:

Urbano BARRETO ARENAS, president, ASEDAR  
Jaime Ernesto CARRILLO, vice-president, ASEDAR  
Saba DOMINGO ZOCADAGUI, (f) comptroller, ASEDAR  
Hernando SANCHEZ BLANCO, treasurer, ASEDAR  
María Luisa MORENO, (f), secretary general, ASEDAR  
José Antonio HERNANDEZ, secretary, ASEDAR  
Yimmy TRIVIÑO ROJAS, spokesperson, ASEDAR  
Temistocles PEREA, spokesperson, ASEDAR  
Francisco A TORRES, spokesperson, ASEDAR  
Luis Ernesto GOYANECHÉ, teacher  
Elbano Antonio ROJAS, teacher

Juan Carlos PARALES, teacher - killed

Members of the teachers union, ASEDAR, have reportedly received death threats in recent weeks. Fears for their safety have been heightened by the killing on 5 April of a teacher who had previously been threatened, and by the attempted killing on 9 April of another teacher.

On 14 February the nine-member executive committee of ASEDAR (named above) received a written death threat signed by a local paramilitary group known as "*Autodefensas del Sarare*", Sarare Self-Defense. The same day, a peaceful march in which the teachers took part was reportedly broken up violently by the National Police and security force personnel, some in civilian dress. Witnesses report that the security forces photographed and filmed those who took part in the march. Urbano Barreto and 11 others were detained by the Investigative Police, *SIJIN, Sección de Policía Judicial e Investigación* for eight hours before being released without charge.

On 7 March Urbano Barreto was approached in the street in Arauca by two unidentified men who threatened him, saying "*Son of a bitch. You don't deserve to live, this is the first (warning), don't expect a second because we'll finish you off with one.*" ("*Perro hijueputa, Usted no merece vivir, este es el primero. No espere el segundo porque lo acabamos es de una.*")

On 5 April Juan Carlos Parales was killed in circumstances which are still unclear. On 9 April unidentified armed men attempted to kill Elbano Antonio Rojas, shooting him twice and leaving him close to death. His current state of health is not known. Another teacher, Luis Ernesto Goyaneche, has reported being threatened by a group of masked men.

Urbano Barreto reports that 43 members of the teachers' union have now received death threats. ASEDAR state that these events have been denounced to the authorities but that so far no step have been taken to investigate either the killing of Juan Carlos Parales, the attack against Elbano Antonio Rojas or the threats against other members of the teachers' union.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1991 three ASEDAR members, including Urbano Barreto Arenas, received death

threats in the form of *sufragios* (invitations to their own funeral mass) (See UA 363/91, AMR 23/63/91, 30 October 1991). On that occasion the *sufragios* were also signed by "Autodefensas del Sarare".

The department of Arauca is located in the remote north-east of Colombia, on the border with Venezuela. For many years several guerrilla groups have been active in the region and, as a result, there is a high presence there of both military and army-backed paramilitary groups. Many paramilitary groups have their origins in the civilian "self-defence" squads which the army created in the 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombia armed forces to combat and disband such groups, paramilitary forces have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents with impunity in many areas of the country and continue to work with the support of the security forces. Although illegal paramilitary activity is principally centred on rural areas of guerrilla influence, "hit squads" - small groups of gunmen - have frequently been despatched to the cities to assassinate trade union leaders, left-wing political activists, human rights activists and national political leaders.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Spanish or in your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of all members of the Arauca teachers' union ASEDAR and in particular the executive committee, following the death threats made against them and following the killing of Juan Carlos Parales and the attack against Elbano Antonio Rojas;
- urging that there be an immediate and thorough investigation into the killing of Juan Carlos Parales, the results of which should be made public; - urging that there should be an immediate and thorough inquiry into the threats made against ASEDAR's executive committee and other members who have been the victims of death threats and harassment;
- urging that all possible measures be taken to protect teachers and union members so that they can carry out their lawful activity without fear for their lives.

**APPEALS TO**

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo  
 Presidente de la República  
 Palacio de Nariño  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: President Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telexes: 44281 PALP CO**

**Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939**

**Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Gaviria**

2) Regional Procurator

Sr. José Jaime Palacios Bonilla  
 Procurador Regional  
 Procuraduría Regional  
 Calle 21 No.18-47  
 Arauca, Arauca, Colombia

**Telegrams: Procurador Regional Palacios Bonilla, Arauca, Arauca, Colombia**

**Salutation: Estimado Sr. Palacios/Dear Regional Procurator**

3) Procurator General:

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta Padilla  
Procurador General de la Nación  
Procuraduría General  
Edificio Banco Ganadero  
Carrera 5, No. 15-80  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 284 0472**

**Salutation: Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Arrieta**

4) Advocate for the People:

Dr. Jaime Córdoba Triviño  
Defensor del Pueblo  
Defensoría del Pueblo  
Calle 35 No. 7-25 piso 5  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Defensor del Pueblo Trivino, Defensoria del Pueblo,  
Bogota, Colombia**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 288 6683**

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

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**ASEDAR

Calle 19, No. 22-74  
Arauca, Arauca, Colombia

Human Rights and Educational Organization

Señores  
CINEP, AA 25916  
Santafé de 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 30 May 1994