

PUBLIC

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UA 191/00

Fear for Safety

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COLOMBIA Roberth Cañarte Montealegre, Trade Union Activist

Trade union activists from the following unions in the department of Valle del Cauca:

Sindicato de Trabajadores de las Empresas Municipales de Servicios Públicos de Cali (SINTRATEMCAI);

Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores y Empleados Universitarios de Colombia (SINTRANUCOL) *Seccional Cali;*

Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) Sub-dirigente Valle del Cauca;

Sindicato del Departamento del Valle del Cauca.

Trade Union activist Roberth Cañarte Montealegre was abducted on 29 June 2000 by paramilitaries of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia, in the south-western department of Valle del Cauca. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for his safety and for that of other trade union activists in Valle del Cauca following threats and intimidation from paramilitary forces in the area.

Roberth Cañarte Montealegre is an active member of the SINTRAMUNICIPIO union. On 31 January 2000 the president of SINTRAMUNICIPIO and founder of the CUT *Sub-dirigente Valle del Cauca*, Trade Union Confederation - Valle del Cauca branch, Orlando Crespo C. was killed, apparently by the AUC.

On 8 February 2000 the following text was included in a letter, signed by the AUC, which was sent to trade union offices: "...*Los acusamos de ser marionetas de la guerrilla... por lo tanto desde ahora son declarados objetivos militares. Objetivo: Cumplir las ordenes de nuestra comandancia.*" ("...We accuse you of being guerrilla .. Therefore from now on you are declared military targets: Objective: To carry out the orders of our command")

Between April and June 2000 a number of trade union leaders in the region received anonymous threatening telephone calls giving them a fixed time in which to leave the city or be "sentenced to death".

On 25 May 2000 some 50 signs appeared in the City of Cali, twelve of which accused SINTRATEMCAI workers of being guerrillas: "*Fuera guerrilla de Emeali y de Cali. Guerrilleros Asesinos.*" ("Emeali and Cali guerrillas get out. Guerrilla murderers.") These signs reportedly remain in place.

In June 2000 Gilberto Agudelo Martínez, National President of SINTRANUCOL, the Colombian University Workers and Employers Union, and a leader of the CUT "disappeared" (see UA 158/00; AMR 23/46/00; 13 June 2000). His whereabouts remain unknown.

On 8 June 2000 the president of the *Sindicato de Trabajadores del municipio de Yumbo*, Elver Alberto Granja, was sent a bomb by post to the union office. The bomb was diffused.

Amnesty International has received reports that unidentified people are now watching the offices of the SINTRATEMCAI union and the houses of leading SINTRATEMCAI activists.

These are just the latest incidents in a sustained attack against trade unionists in the south-western region of Colombia since July 1999 when the AUC declared that they were beginning to operate in the area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For many years the security and armed forces and their paramilitary allies have accused trade unionists, human rights workers, members of legal opposition groups and popular activists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. The people they have accused have frequently been harassed, tortured and killed, often by paramilitaries. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Annual Survey for 1999 recorded that during the previous year more than 90 trade unionists had been murdered in Colombia.

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 UfA 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 not 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 Roberth Cañarte Montalégre who was abducted on 29 June 2000 and for other trade union activists in Valle del Cauca;
- urging that there should be a full and impartial investigation to establish the whereabouts of Roberth Cañarte Montalégre and make all efforts to secure his immediate release;
- urging that those responsible for his abduction be brought to justice;
- asking the authorities what measures they are going to take to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- 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

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogota, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939/284 2186/289 3377

Salutation: Dear President / Exemo. Sr Presidente

Minister of Interior

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

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 286 8025

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Governor of Valle del Cauca Department

Señor Juan Fernando Bonilla, Gobernador del Departamento de Valle del Cauca
Gobernación de Valle del Cauca
A.A. 8759, Santiago de Cali, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Fax: + 57 2 885 8813

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Trade Union Confederation

Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT)
Apartado Aéreo 221, 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 11 August 2000.