

UA 128/01

Fear for

COLOMBIA José Gilberto OLMOS CARDOZO, Héctor Manuel VANEGAS, Alfonso NARANJO, Olga Lucia ARIAS, Raquel SALINAS, Gilberto OLMOS, Erley CADAVID, Ema GÓMEZ, Cenia VASQUEZ, Adriana OLMOS

Other ANTHOC union activists

Army-backed paramilitaries have reportedly ordered at least 10 trade union activists to leave the city of Honda, in Tolima department. The 10, who work at the San Juan de Dios Hospital, are members of the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Salud* (ANTHOC), Health Workers' Union.

According to reports, during a union meeting on 9 May, health worker José Gilberto Olmos Cardozo answered a phone call from a man who said he belonged to the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia: "*Somos del grupo de limpieza de las autodefensas de Ramón Isaza les damos una semana de plazo para que se vayan fuera de la ciudad de Honda...*" ("We are from the AUC's Ramón Isaza social cleansing group. We are giving you a week to leave the city of Honda...") He then named health workers Cenia Velásquez, Raquel Salinas and Héctor Manuel Vanegas.

One of the health workers named in the call, Héctor Manuel Vanegas, also received a phone call that day from a man who said he was from the AUC. The caller ordered Héctor Manuel Vanegas to meet him at 4pm. At the meeting, the man handed over a list of ANTHOC activists, and said they must meet with the AUC on 11 May or be killed.

The list named Alfonso Naranjo, Olga Lucia Arias, Raquel Salinas, Gilberto Olmos, Erley Cadavid, Ema Gómez, Cenia Vasquez and Adriana Olmos. When they did not go to meet the AUC, they were ordered to attend another meeting on 18 May, and told that the paramilitaries knew where to find them.

The ANTHOC activists have reported these threats to the regional office of the *Fiscalía General de la Nación*, Attorney General's Office, in Honda, as well as hospital authorities, local civilian and military authorities and the city's police.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The security forces and their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. Those they accuse are frequently harassed, tortured and killed. At least 112 trade unionists were murdered during 2000, the majority by army-backed paramilitaries. According to the Colombian Trade Union Confederation (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT), 44 trade union activists have been killed so far this year. In December 2000, a senior trade union leader, Wilson Borja Díaz, had to flee the country after he was shot and wounded by gunmen (see UA 387/00, 21 December 2000). Judicial investigations have linked several active and retired police officers to the attack. On 15 February, 25 unionists affiliated to the CUT occupied the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in protest at the threats, harassment and persecution they face.

The systematic persecution of trade unionists in Colombia has been going on for years. During the 1998 national strike, seven trade union leaders, including CUT Vice-president Jorge Ortega Garcia, were shot dead (see UA 274/98, AMR

23/80/98, 21 October 1998 and follow up, AMR 23/90/98, 24 November 1998). Those responsible for the killings 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 the ANTHOC union activists named above, who have been ordered to leave the city of Honda by army-backed paramilitaries, and for that of other ANTHOC members;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and full investigation into the paramilitary threats, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- asking the authorities what measures they are going to take to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- urging the authorities to 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

Sr. Armando Estrada Villa
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

Governor of Tolima department

Gobernador del Departamento de Tolima
Sr. Guillermo Alfonso Jaramillo
Gobernación de Tolima
Calle 10 y 11, Carrera 3
Ibagué, Tolima, Colombia
Faxes: +57 82 638588

Salutation: Dear Governor / Sr. Gobernador

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

CSPP
AA 22803
Bogota
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 5 July 2001.