

PUBLIC

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UA 296/04 Fear for safety

COLOMBIA **Francisco Ramírez Cuellar (m), president of the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Empresa Nacional Minera* (SINTRAMINERCOL), Trade Union of the National Mining Industry**
Ludivia Giraldo (f), head of the SINTRAMINERCOL human rights department

Trade union leader Francisco Ramírez Cuellar has escaped a suspected attempt to kill him, and his colleague Ludivia Giraldo has been followed, raising fears that an attempt on her life may be being planned. Both work for the trade union SINTRAMINERCOL, which has produced reports on human rights violations by the security forces.

Francisco Ramírez is the president of SINTRAMINERCOL, which represents workers from the state mining corporation Minercol. On 10 October at 1.30pm he left his home in the capital, Bogotá, to go for lunch with his nieces. As he was walking through the Palermo district of the city, he noticed two men on a high-powered motorcycle without number plates coming towards him, and saw that the passenger had a gun in his lap and was staring at him. He took cover immediately. The motorbike had stopped, and was holding up traffic, so other vehicles apparently honked their horns, forcing it to move on. Had it not been for this, Francisco Ramírez believes the gunman would have been able to shoot him. A few days before this, he had reportedly noticed men keeping watch on his home.

Ludivia Giraldo, head of SINTRAMINERCOL's human rights department, was reportedly followed by four men in a yellow taxi on 29 September, from 6pm to 8.30 pm. In the past trade union activists and other human rights defenders have frequently been kept under surveillance before attempts are made on their lives.

Francisco Ramírez has survived several attempts on his life in the past few years. On 1 May 2004 two men and a woman in a white Renault car kept watch on people going into and out of the union's office in Bogotá, in particular Francisco Ramírez. His bodyguards found out from the police that the people in the car were members of the national police intelligence unit on an assignment. The following day two bombs exploded at the SINTRAMINERCOL offices.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Guerrilla groups are fighting against the security forces and their paramilitary allies for control of coal-mining areas in Colombia. SINTRAMINERCOL has repeatedly filed complaints with the authorities about human rights violations committed in mining areas by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. People who file such complaints are frequently attacked or killed in retaliation. In 2003, around 70 trade unionists were killed, and so far this year more than 40 have lost their lives, most of them at the hands of paramilitaries. Guerrilla forces have also killed people they accuse of siding with their enemies.

The Ministry of Interior runs a protection programme for trade unionists whose lives are believed to be in danger, but this programme has not been accompanied by effective action to ensure full and impartial investigations into human rights violations against trade unionists and efforts to bring those responsible to justice.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Francisco Ramírez, Ludivia Giraldo and the other members of SINTRAMINERCOL, and urging the authorities to ensure that all measures deemed appropriate by Francisco Ramírez and Ludivia Giraldo are taken to protect them;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the threats and the apparent attempt on Francisco Ramírez's life on 10 October, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for the Ministry of Interior's protection program for trade unionists to be adequately resourced in order to provide more effective protection to trade unionists.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

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

Fax: + 57 1 342 0592 / 337 5890

Salutation: Dear President Uribe/ Excmo. Sr. Presidente 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

COPIES TO:

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
Fiscal General de la Nación
Fiscalía General de la Nación
Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite)
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 / 2000 (you will hear a message in Spanish asking you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

SINTRAMINERCOL

Calle 32 No. 13-07, 3er piso
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 7 December 2004.