

UA 246/01

Fea.

COLOMBIAHernando Montoya (m), trade union leader

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Trade Union leader Hernando Montoya, following death threats from a paramilitary group.

Hernando Montoya is a trade union leader and former President of *Sindicato de Trabajadores y Empleados de Servicios Públicos* (SINTRAEMSDES), Union of Public Service Workers and Employees, in the municipality of Cartago, department of Valle del Cauca.

On 7 September, he received a written death threat which said: "*Sr Montoya: Le informamos que entre el mes de septiembre y octubre, se llevará a cabo su asesinato y este trabajo lo harán personas de fuera de la ciudad contratadas por personas de Cartago. Cuidese*"; "Mr Montoya, We inform you that between September and October you will be killed and that work will be undertaken by people contracted outside the town by people of Cartago. Look after yourself".

Recently, Hernando Montoya was reportedly threatened by a paramilitary group calling itself *Cooperativa de Seguridad* (COPROSEG), Security Cooperative, which has claimed responsibility for killing several members of SINTRAEMSDES over the last year. He has received some protection measures from the Ministry of the Interior, but given the latest death threat it is of concern that these will not be sufficient. In February 2001, paramilitary forces reportedly threatened members of the Pereira branch of SINTRAEMSDES in the department of Risaralda (see UA 44/01, AMR 23/020/2001, 16 February 2001).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The security and armed forces and their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. The people they accuse are frequently harassed, tortured and killed, often by paramilitaries. During 2000, 112 trade union leaders and members were murdered. In December 2000, a leading trade union leader, Wilson Borja Díaz, had to flee Colombia after he was shot and wounded by gunmen (see UA 387/00, 21 December 2000). Several active and retired police have been linked to the attack by judicial investigations. So far this year over 90 trade unionists have been killed the majority by army-backed paramilitary groups. On 15 February, 25 unionists affiliated to the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Trade Union Confederation, occupied the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in protest at the threats, harassment and persecution that trade unionists continue to be subjected to.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Hernando Montoya and other union activists with SINTRAEMSDES following recent threats;
- asking the authorities what measures they are going to take to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- urging for an independent, impartial and conclusive investigation to be carried out into the threats with those responsible brought to justice;
- 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:Presidente, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 566 2071

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Minister of the Interior

Señor 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 1 562 5298/ 562 9890

Salutation:Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Mayor of Cartago

Señor Alcalder Luis Carlos Restrepo Orozco
Alcaldia Municipal de Cartago
Calle 8ª entre carreras 6ª y 7ª
Edificio Municipal CAM Cartago
Valle del Cauca
Colombia

Telegrams: Alcalde Cartago, Cartago, Colombia

Salutation: Dear Sir/Sr Alcalde.

COPIES TO:

Trade Union

Sintramunicipio Cartago, Cra 8ª # 8 - 26 Cartago - Valle del Cauca, 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 November 2001.