

PUBLIC

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19 August 2003

UA 246/03 Death threats/fear for safety

COLOMBIA Mauricio Alvarez (m)]
 Víctor Jaimes (m)] leaders of the *Unión Sindical Obrera (USO)*,
 Juvencio Serpa (m)] Oil Workers= Trade Union in Barrancabermeja
 Elkin Menco (m)]
 Other members of the USO

Mauricio Alvarez, Víctor Jaimes, Juvencio Serpa and Elkin Menco, all leaders of the *Unión Sindical Obrera (USO)*, Oil Workers= Trade Union, in the city of Barrancabermeja, Norte del Santander Department, have received a death threat. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for their safety, and for that of other members of the USO.

On 15 August, *Muerte a Dirigentes de la USO (MDU)*, Death to USO Leaders, an organization thought to be a paramilitary group, sent a written death threat to the Barrancabermeja branch office of the USO. The threat stated: "MDU is launched. The MDU armed group, sure of the decision taken after studying in detail the USO sons-of-bitches, has given the order to kill the first ones to be executed by our MDU organization charged with finishing off the USO sons-of-bitches. We make public the first martyrs who will be gunned down by us. Mauricio Alvarez, Víctor Jaimes, Juvencio Serpa and Elkin Menco. Fourteenth August 2003"

"MDU inicia. El grupo armado MDU (muerte a dirigentes de la Unión Sindical Obrera- USO) Seguros de la desición (sic) tomada después de estudiar detenidamente a los h.p. de la USO ha dado la orden de dar de baja a los primeros a ser ejecutados por nuestra organización MDU encargada de acabar con los h.p. de la USO publicamos los primeros mártires que serán abatidos por nosotros. Mauricio Alvarez, Víctor Jaimes, Juvencio Serpa, Elkin Menco. Agosto catorce año 2003."

In May 2003, the Cartagena branch of the USO received a death threat via e-mail from the army-backed paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC)*, United Self Defense Forces of Colombia, declaring members of the union to be military targets (see UA 136/03, AMR 23/037/2003, 15 May 2003). On 14 July 2003 a former leader of the USO, Marco Tulio Díaz Fernández, was reportedly shot and killed by unidentified men as he was leaving his relatives' home in the city of Cúcuta, Norte del Santander Department.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

USO trade unionists have been repeatedly threatened and have been the victims of extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" committed by army-backed paramilitaries. In addition, the security and armed forces as well as their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or their auxiliaries. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for killing and threatening those they accuse of collaborating with their enemies.

The *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (CUT)*, Colombian Trade Union Congress, estimates that in 2002, at least 172 affiliated trade unionists were victims of extrajudicial executions in Colombia. One hundred and sixty four received death threats, 26 were victims of kidnapping, 17 were victims of an attempted kidnapping, seven were forcibly displaced, 132 were arbitrarily detained and around 80 sought exile. According to the CUT, these violations are a direct consequence of their trade union activity. More than 35 trade unionists have been killed in Colombia so far this year.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of members of the *Unión Sindical Obrera* (USO), Oil Workers Trade Union, both in Barrancabermeja and nationally, following the reported paramilitary death threat against the trade union;
- asking the authorities what measures, deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves, they are going to take to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the latest threat, reportedly from the *Muerte a Dirigentes de la USO* (MDU), for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Colombia to be included in these investigations;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and other recommendations made by the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations.

APPEALS TO: (*Please note there is currently no telegram service to Colombia*)

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 58 90

Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe / Dear President Uribe

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Fernando Londoño Hoyos,
 Ministro del Interior y de Justicia
 Ministerio del Interior
 Palacio Echeverry, Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 566 4573

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Attorney General

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

Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 /2017 (if someone answers say “me da tono de fax por favor por Dr Osorio”)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

Corporación Colectivo de Abogados ‘José Alvear Restrepo’,
 (‘José Alvear Restrepo’ Lawyers’ Collective)
 AA 33035, 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 September 2003.