

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety/Possible "disappearance"

COLOMBIA Gilberto Torres Martínez (m) - trade union leader
Other members of the Oil Worker's Union (USO), Monterrey Municipality,
Department of Casanare

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of members of the Oil Worker's Union (USO), in Monterrey Municipality, Department of Casanare and Gilberto Torres Martínez, a trade union leader who has not been seen since he was reportedly abducted by army-backed paramilitaries on 25 February.

According to information received, at approximately 6:00pm, Gilberto Torres Martínez left his place of work at the *Estación Porvenir del Oleoducto Central de los Llanos*, Porvenir Station of the Llanos Central Oil-pipeline, Monterrey Municipality, to go home. He was reportedly abducted by several heavily-armed men thought to be members of the *Bloque Centauros de las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), Centauros Bloc of the United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, who reportedly took him away in the direction of Puerto López Municipality in the neighbouring department of Meta.

Amnesty International's concern for the safety of Gilberto Torres Martínez is heightened by the fact that USO activists have frequently been the target of death threats and serious human rights violations carried out by paramilitary forces allied to the security forces. In December 2001 Aury Sará Marrugo and his bodyguard Enrique Arellano were forcibly abducted by paramilitaries and subsequently killed. (See UA 309/01, AMR 23/121/2001, 3 December 2001 and follow-up AMR 23/122/2001, 6 December 2001). Concern is further heightened because the paramilitaries were able to forcibly abduct Gilberto Torres Martínez despite the presence of a Colombian Army base near the Porvenir oil installations and the fact that the army maintains checkpoints along the roads by the oil installations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This kidnapping follows other recent threats and killings against USO trade unionists over the last year. (See UA 170/01, AMR 23/067/01, 10 July 2001; UA 230/01, AMR 23/088/2001, 12 September 2001 and follow-ups) as well as the arrest of six USO leaders by the security forces on 19 October. The security and armed forces as well as their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. In addition, paramilitaries frequently harass, torture and kill trade unionists. In 2001, around 160 trade unionists have been killed and at least 68 "disappeared". 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, AMR 23/104/00, 21 December 2000). Several active and retired police officers have been linked to the attack by judicial investigations.

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

- urging the authorities to order an independent, impartial and conclusive investigation into the possible "disappearance" of Gilberto Torres Martínez and for those responsible to be brought to justice;

- urging that the authorities undertake immediate action to guarantee the safety of Gilberto Torres Martínez;
- expressing concern for the safety of USO and other trade union activists in Casanare and nationally following the possible "disappearance" of Gilberto Torres Martínez;
- 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 links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Casanare urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- 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 1 566 2071**Salutation: Dear President Pastrana Arango / Excmo. Sr. Presidente Pastrana Arango**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 1 562 5298 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")****Salutation:Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro**Commander of the Armed Forces

General Fernando Tapias Stahelin,
 Comandante General de las Fuerzas Militares
 Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52,
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante Fuerzas Militares, Bogota, Colombia**Fax: + 57 1 222 2096****Salutation: Dear Commander Tapias Stahelin / Sr. General Tapias Stahelin****COPIES TO:**Trade Union Confederation

CUT, Nacional, Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia
 Calle 35 N° 7-25, Piso 9
 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 10 April 2002.