

UA 111/02

Fear for**COLOMBIA** Arturo Vásquez Galeano (m), community leader and trade union activist

**Killed: Diofanol Sierra Vargas (m)]
Oscar Alfonso Jurado (m)] Trade union leaders
Alfredo Zapata Herrera (m)]**

Trade union activist Arturo Vásquez Galeano was abducted on 5 April, by men believed to be army-backed paramilitaries. Another trade union leader had been killed two days earlier, and two more have been killed since. Amnesty International is gravely concerned for his safety, and for that of other trade unionists in Colombia.

Arturo Vásquez Galeano is a member of the umbrella organisation of Colombian trade unions, the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Colombian Trade Union Confederation. He was leaving work in Abejorral Municipality, Antioquia Department, on his way to Medellín, when he was abducted.

One of the leaders of the cement workers' union (SUTIMAC), Alfredo Zapata Herrera, had been abducted on 3 April as he travelled home from his job at the El Cairo Cement Works, Antioquia Department, on the employees' bus. Members of the army-backed paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, reportedly stopped the bus, forced Alfredo off and took him away. His body was found the following day, near the spot where he had been abducted, with several gunshot wounds.

On 8 April 2002, paramilitaries reportedly broke into the house of food workers' union (SINTRAINAL) leader Diofanol Sierra Vargas, in Barrancabermeja, Santander department. They dragged him into the street and shot him dead in front of his family.

The next day in Cali, Valle del Cauca Department, trade unionist Oscar Alfonso Jurado was shot twice by an unknown gunman, and died instantly, as he waited for a bus to work. He was one of the leaders of the chemical workers' union, SINTRAQUIM.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The security and armed forces and their paramilitary allies have often accused trade unionists, of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. As a result trade unionists have frequently been harassed, tortured and killed, often by paramilitaries. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) recorded that in 2001 alone, over 160 trade unionists were murdered, and that harassment and violence is widespread. According to reports from the CUT, so far this year some 50 trade unionists have been killed the majority by army-backed paramilitaries.

SINTRAINAL and SUTIMAC trade union members have been threatened by army-backed paramilitaries in the past (see UA 59/02, AMR 23/026/02, 25 February 2002 and UA 74/01, AMR 23/037/01, 30 March 2001).

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

- urging the authorities to order an independent, impartial and conclusive investigation into the abduction of Arturo Vásquez Galeano, and bring those responsible to justice;

- urging them to take immediate action to ensure that Arturo Vásquez Galeano is released unharmed;
- expressing concern for the safety of CUT trade union activists nationally following the abduction of Arturo Vásquez Galeano and the killing of Diofanol Sierra Vargas, and Alfredo Zapata Herrera by army-backed paramilitaries and Oscar Alfonso Jurado by unidentified gunmen;
- asking the authorities what measures, deemed appropriate by members of the CUT, SINTRAINAL, SUTIMAC and SINTRAQUIM, they are going to take to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the departments of Antioquia, Santander and Valle del Cauca, and 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

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 23 May 2002.