

UA 284/02

Fear for

COLOMBIA trade union members of the Colombian Electricity Workers' Trade Union (SINTRAELECOL) Arauca Branch, the health workers' union (ANTHOC) and the Association of Teachers of Arauca (ASEDAR)

journalists and other social activists in the department of Arauca

Amnesty International delegates returning from the department of Arauca in eastern Colombia are concerned for the safety of workers and trade unionists of the regional electricity company, teachers and medical personnel as well as of journalists and social activists in the departmental capital Arauca and throughout the department of Arauca, after receiving information of reported death threats made by army-backed paramilitaries in the region.

According to information received, the army-backed paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, threatened trade unionists and what is thought to be a reference to newspaper editors. The paramilitaries accused them of links to "subversive groups" and declared them to be "military objectives of our units". (*"Existen algunas personas, sindicalistas, directores, comprometidos con grupos subversivos, estos líderes son declarados objetivo militar de nuestras unidades"*).

This death threat was received on 11 September by electricity workers of the *Empresa de Energía de Arauca (ENELAR ESP)*, Arauca Energy Company, and follows two previous death threats. In the first, dated 6 July, the AUC stated that the identities of more than 150 workers in the municipal capitals of Tame, Forul, Arauquita, Fortul, Cravo Norte, Puerto Rondón and the surrounding rural areas are known to them (*"están plenamente identificados más de 150 trabajadores de Arauca y cabeceras Municipales de Tame, Forul, Arauquita, Fortul, Cravo y Rondón, y sus áreas rurales"*). On 7 July, in an emailed death threat sent to the company, the AUC threatened employees and members of the Arauca Branch of the Colombian electricity workers' union *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Electricidad de Colombia* (SINTRAELECOL): "Bosses, trade unionists and some workers...you are warned that you have to resign immediately, if not you will have to face up to the consequences" (*"Jefes, sindicalistas y algunos trabajadores...se les advierte que tienen que renunciar de manera inmediata, de lo contrario deberán atenerse a las consecuencias"*).

These threats heighten Amnesty International's concerns for other social activists, including those belonging to the health workers' union ANTHOC and the *Asociación de Educadores de Arauca* (ASEDAR), Association of Teachers of Arauca. These threats follow numerous reports received by Amnesty International of increasing paramilitary presence in heavily-militarized areas, including reports of paramilitary night patrols in the capital Arauca and other municipal capitals.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Fears for the safety of these sectors of civil society are further heightened by the fact that they have frequently been labelled as guerrillas or guerrilla collaborators by members of the security forces. In the past such accusations have often been followed by serious human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups.

Many civilian sectors in the department of Arauca, including mayors, other public officials and health workers have also been threatened and killed by

armed opposition forces belonging to the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), National Liberation Army. These groups have also launched indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against military targets which have resulted in killings and wounding of civilians.

Army-backed paramilitary forces have been able to consolidate their presence in the department of Arauca despite the large presence of the security forces in the department. Paramilitary forces have reportedly been able to operate checkpoints in close proximity to military positions for prolonged periods of time. Security force personnel have threatened civilian communities with paramilitary incursions. Despite reports of limited confrontations between the security forces and paramilitaries, the paramilitary forces continue to operate in areas known to the authorities. These operations may have been designed to disguise the strong links between the security forces and paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of trade union members of the Arauca Branch-SINTRAELECOL, ANTHOC and ASEDAR, workers of *ENELAR ESP*, journalists and other social activists in the department of Arauca, following reports of paramilitary threats against them;
- urging that all measures, deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves, are taken to guarantee their safety;
- urging that full and impartial investigations into these threats are undertaken, that the results are made public and that those responsible are brought to justice;
- urging full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary forces in Arauca are undertaken, that the results are made public and that those members of the security forces responsible for operating in unison with paramilitary forces or supporting them are brought to justice;
- expressing concern at the continued large-scale presence of AUC forces in Arauca despite the heavy military presence in the department and urging immediate decisive action to confront and dismantle these groups in line with repeated UN recommendations and governmental commitments.

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

Telegram: Presidente de la República, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 566 2071 / 342 0592

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

Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia

Vicepresidente de la República de Colombia

Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón

Vicepresidencia

Carrera 8A No 5-57

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Vice-Presidente Bell, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 334 1138

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Vicepresidente/ Dear Vice-President

Director of the National Police

General Teodoro Campo Gómez

Director de la Policía Nacional

Transversal 45 # 40-11 CAN

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Director, Policia Nacional, General Campo Gómez, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 428 7634

Salutation: Estimado General Campo Gómez / Dear General Campo Gómez

COPIES TO:

National Advocate for the people

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,

Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,

Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301,

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: National Advocate, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 640 0491 / 346 1225

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Cifuentes Muñoz / Dear Mr. Cifuentes Muñoz

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 29 October 2002.