

UA 269/01

Fear for safety

23 October 2001

COLOMBIA

Aquiles Portilla (m)]	
Jairo Rosero (m)]	Members of SINAMA (Nariño)
Jaime Goyes (m)]	Teachers' Trade Union)
Rosalba Oviedo (f)]	
Ricardo Chavez (m)]	
Pedro Leytón (m)]	members of Empopasto (Nariño)
Diego Escandón (m)]	Civil Servants' Trade Union)
Luis Ortega (m)]	

Trade unionists in the department of Nariño have received written death threats from army-backed paramilitaries. This is the latest in a series of threats, and Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

On 8 October the office of the *Sindicato de Maestros de Nariño* (SIMANA), Nariño Teachers Trade Union, received a letter which read: "Our goal is to finish with subversion and criminal groups. The leaders of the CUT, *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, Colombian Trade Union Confederation, and other guerrilla auxiliary organizations will be executed". (*Nuestra meta es acabar con la subersión y los grupos delincuenciales. Los directivos de la CUT, y otras organizaciones auxiliadoras de la guerrilla serán ajusticiados.*)

It also said that the trade unionists named above would be "called to account for their links with the guerrilla groups". The letter was signed: Pablo, *Comandante Bloque Libertadores del Sur AUC*, (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*), Commander of the Southern Liberators Bloc of the AUC, (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia)

Several members of the SIMANA and Empopasto trade unions have apparently been forced to leave the region because of repeated death threats. Many of their names have appeared on paramilitary death lists like the one that has been sent to SIMANA. Since last year seven teachers have been killed in Nariño Department. The most recent killings were on 20 October, when two teachers were killed in Sandoná municipality; one of them, Jesús Agreda, was the municipal SIMANA delegate.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The security forces and their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. Those they accuse are frequently harassed, tortured and killed. At least 112 trade unionists were murdered during 2000, the majority by army-backed paramilitaries. In December 2000, a senior trade union leader, Wilson Borja Díaz, fled the country after he was shot and wounded in an attack which judicial investigations have linked to several active and retired police officers (See UA 387/00, AMR 23/104/2000, 21 December 2000).

At least 115 trade unionists are reported to have been killed so far in 2001, the majority by army backed paramilitaries. On 15 February, 25 unionists affiliated to the Colombian Trade Union Congress (CUT), *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, occupied the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in protest at the threats, harassment and persecution they face.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the SIMANA and Empopasto members named above, and other union activists in Nariño department, who have received paramilitary death threats;
- asking the authorities what they are doing to protect those at risk;
- urging them to order an independent, impartial and conclusive investigation into the threats, and bring those responsible to justice;

- urging them 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 / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gustavo Bell, Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado, Carrera 52 OFI. 217

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Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 0059

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Governor of Nariño Department

Gobernador del Departamento de Nariño

Sr. Parmenio Cuéllar Bastidas

Gobernación de Nariño, Calle 19, No. 23-78

Pasto, Nariño, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 27 23 53 29

Telegrams: Gobernador del Departamento, Pasto, Nariño, Colombia

Salutation: Dear Governor / Sr. Gobernador

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 4 December 2001.