

PUBLIC

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UA 302/00

Fear for Safety/Extrajudicial Executions

28 September 2000

COLOMBIA Leaders of SINTRAEMCALI and other trade unions in Valle del Cauca department

The leader of a trade union campaigning against the privatisation of Cali's public services has narrowly escaped an assassination attempt. Another member of the union died in the attack. The union's leaders have received repeated death threats, and Amnesty International believes that they and other union leaders in the region are in grave danger.

Ricardo Herrera is the leader of the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de las Empresas Municipales de Cali* (SINTRAEMCALI), Cali Trade Union of Municipal Service Workers. Gunmen reportedly tried to kill him on 19 September, missing him but fatally wounding Omar Noguera, who died a few days later.

Two weeks before the attack, in the face of death threats, the union had formally asked President Andrés Pastrana to assume responsibility for Herrera's safety. The SINTRAEMCALI executive committee (*junta directiva*) have received repeated written and telephone death threats throughout the year. A leading member of the union, Alexander López Maya, was recently forced to leave the area in fear for his life, reportedly after plans to kill him were discovered.

SINTRAEMCALI has waged a long campaign against the privatisation of Cali's electricity, water, sewage and telecommunications utilities. Several foreign companies are reportedly interested in purchasing the utility companies once they are privatized. The municipal council voted against privatisation in February 2000, and since then the union's members have faced increased death threats.

SINTRAEMCALI has also denounced corruption in the municipal utility services, and criminal investigations have led to a number of convictions.

Among the other trade unions in the department of Valle del Cauca believed to be at risk are SINALTRAINAL, Trade Union of Food Industry Workers, who have complained to the authorities that their offices in Bugalagrande were being kept under constant surveillance. (See UA 191/00, AMR 23/51/00, 30 June 2000 for more information on attacks on trade unionists in the region)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For many years the security and armed forces and their paramilitary allies have accused trade unionists, human rights workers, members of legal opposition groups and popular activists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. The people they have accused have frequently been harassed, tortured and killed, often by paramilitaries. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Annual Survey for 1999 recorded that during the previous year more than 90 trade unionists had been murdered in Colombia.

Amnesty International has documented systematic persecution of trade unionists in Colombia. Seven trade union leaders were shot dead during the 1998 national strike, including the vice-president of the trade union umbrella organisation *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, Jorge Ortega Garcia (see UA 274/98, AMR 23/80/98, 21 October 1998, and follow up, AMR 23/90/98, 24 November 1998). None of these crimes has been resolved and those responsible have not been brought to justice.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of leaders of SINTRAEMCALI and other trade unions in the Valle del Cauca;
- urging a full and impartial investigation into the attempt made on Ricardo Herrera's life and the killing of Omar Noguera on 19 September, the reported plans to kill Alexander López, and the repeated written and telephoned death threats against SINTRAEMCALI in the last few months, with the results be made public and those responsible brought to justice;

- asking the authorities what action they will take to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- 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

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogota, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939/284 2186/289 3377

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr Presidente

Minister of Interior

Señor Humberto De La Calle
Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Palacio Echeverry
Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o., Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Governor of Valle del Cauca Department

Señor Juan Fernando Bonilla, Gobernador del Departamento de Valle del Cauca
Gobernación de Valle del Cauca
A.A. 8759, Santiago de Cali, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 2 885 8813

Salutation: Dear Governor / Sr. Gobernador

COPIES TO:

Trade Union Confederation

Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT)
Apartado Aéreo 221, 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 9 November 2000.