

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/62/99

UA 227/99

Fear for

COLOMBIA Human rights workers and trade unionists in Medellín, Antioquia department.

There is serious concern for the safety of human rights workers and trade unionists in Medellín, after two bombs exploded outside the offices of a trade union and a human rights organisation in the city on 29 August 1999. A third bomb, left outside another trade union office, was deactivated. No one has yet admitted responsibility for the attacks.

The bombs that were left outside the offices of the human rights organization, *Instituto Popular de Capacitación* (IPC), Popular Training Institute and the trade union *Cooperativa de Trabajadores Varios* (Aseo), General Workers' Cooperative, caused serious damage to the offices and surrounding buildings, and injured a taxi driver. A third bomb was left outside the offices of the *Unión Sindical Obrera* (USO), National Oil Workers' Union, but was deactivated.

The IPC is a long established and internationally respected non-governmental human rights organization specializing in research, popular education and peace promotion in Medellín and the department of Antioquia.

On 28 January 1999 four members of the IPC were abducted from their offices in Medellín by the paramilitary group, *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia led by Carlos Castaño. The national and international outcry at the abductions was crucial in securing the eventual release of all four hostages by 18 February 1999 (EXTRA 12/99, AMR 23/04/99, 29 January 1999, and follow-ups).

The bomb attack on the IPC offices comes only days after the AUC leaders were formally charged with the abductions by the *Fiscalía*, Attorney General's Office. However, no-one has been arrested.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For many years trade unionists, human rights workers, members of legal opposition groups and other civil society activists in Colombia have been accused of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries by the security and armed forces. Such accusations have frequently been followed by serious human rights violations, often perpetrated by the security forces' paramilitary allies. Some armed opposition groups have also refused to respect the legitimacy and independence of organizations belonging to civil society.

In the past attacks on trade unionists have frequently coincided with national strikes. In October 1999 the leader of a national trade union, Jorge Ortega, was gunned down at just such a time (UA 274/98, AMR 23/80/98, 21 October 1998). As with many other similar crimes, the authorities have failed to bring to justice those responsible for his murder.

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

- condemning the bomb attacks on the offices of the IPC, Aseo and USO in Medellín;
- expressing grave concern for all human rights activists and trade unionists in Medellín, particularly those belonging to the IPC, Aseo and USO;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate and effective steps to guarantee the safety of all those at risk;

- calling for a prompt, impartial and full investigation into the bomb attacks, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/ 284 2186/ 337 1351

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Néstor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministerio del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Fax:+ 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5884 / 342 3201

Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Governor of the Department of Antioquia

Dr. Alberto Builes Ortega, Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia
Gobernación de Antioquia, Calle 42B, # 52-106,Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia

Fax: + 574 381 1342

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez,

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Diagonal 22B 5201, Apartado Aéreo 29855, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 571 570 2022

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Gómez/Dear Dr. Gómez

COPIES TO: Instituto Popular de Capacitación (IPC), Apartado Aéreo
9690,Medellín, Antioquia, 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 12 October 1999.