

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/65/98

UA 230/98 Fear for safety/Death threats

27 August 1998

COLOMBIA July González Villadiego (f), Rafael Peña, Olimpo Cárdenas, Álvaro Pulido, Ana Cecilia Escorcía (f), Miguel González, Segundo Mora, Ivan Ferreira, Jesús Arias, Raúl Malagon, Héctor Florez, Mauricio Álvarez, Edgar Rodríguez, Orlando Romero, Jesús Arévalo, Álvaro Quintero, Emidgio Triana - all members of the National Executive of the *Unión Nacional de Empleados Bancarios* (UNEB), National Bank Workers' Union, other UNEB members, and

**Domingo Rafael Tovar Arrieta, a leader of the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT),
Trade Union Confederation**

There is serious concern for the safety of the the above-named leaders of the *Unión Nacional de Empleados Bancarios* (UNEB), National Bank Workers' Union, after they received death threats, reportedly issued by a paramilitary organization.

On 13 August 1998 an anonymous phonecaller made death threats against July González Villadiego and her partner, Domingo Rafael Tovar Arrieta, a leader of the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Trade Union. On 15 August, the couple received further telephone death threats.

A fax sent to the CUT offices on 21 August accused the UNEB and members of its National Executive of being "guerrilla auxiliaries" and declared that the UNEB and its National Executive were now military targets.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For many years trade unionists, human rights workers, members of legal opposition groups and popular activists in Colombia have frequently 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.

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. The Colombian Government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989. Yet these groups continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

No effective steps have been taken by the authorities as yet to control the actions of such groups and to hold their members accountable for the serious and widespread human rights violations they commit. The Attorney General recently stated that more than 200 arrest warrants issued against alleged paramilitary members in connection with human rights violations have still not been acted upon by the security forces.

Colombia's new President, Andrés Pastrana, took office on 8 August 1998. So far, he and his government have not taken any steps or made any commitments to tackle the country's long running human rights crisis.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Domingo Rafael Tovar Arrieta, a leader of the CUT, the members of the National Executive of UNEB (name some of them) and all other UNEB members in the light of the repeated death threats made against them;

- calling on the authorities to take all steps deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves to guarantee their safety;
- urging that all threats against the above named trade unionists be fully and impartially investigated and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups and urging that those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments;
- calling on President Pastrana's government to take immediate and decisive action to tackle Colombia's human rights crisis;
- reminding Colombia's new government of the country's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

APPEALS TO:President of Colombia,

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

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

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

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2, Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Fax:+ 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405

Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo, Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO / 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874 / 288 4906

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez, Fiscal General de la Nación,
Fiscalia General de la Nación, Diagonal 22B 5201, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General, Fiscalia General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 571 570 2000 (when ansaphone picks up dial 2017 for fax)

Salutation: Estimado Dr./Dear Dr.

COPIES TO:Trade Union

Union Nacional de Empleados Bancarios, Calle 28 No. 16-34, 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 8 October 1998.

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."
Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Visit the Amnesty International UDHR campaign website on <http://www.amnesty.excite.com>