

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/17/99

17 February 1999

Further information on UA 150/98 (AMR 23/29/98, 13 May 1998) - Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA Members of Sindicato de Trabajadores del Municipio de Cartago
(SINTRAMUNICIPIO-Cartago), Union of Municipal Workers in
the municipality of Cartago, department of Valle del Cauca

and new name: Pablo Emilio Calvo

Gilberto Tovar Escudero - killed

The recent killing of SINTRAMUNICIPIO-Cartago trade union leader Gilberto Tovar Escudero and the death threat issued soon after to another of its leaders, Pablo Emilio Calvo, has raised concern for his safety and that of other members of the union.

Gilberto Tovar Escudero was shot dead on 14 February 1999 in his home in Cartago in front of his wife and one of his children by unidentified gunmen believed to be members of a paramilitary group.

Members of the SINTRAMUNICIPIO-Cartago union, including Gilberto Tovar, had received death threats in April 1998 from a paramilitary group called COOPROSEG. This followed protests by the union at the apparent failure of the local authorities to comply with agreements they had made with municipal workers about working conditions. A *lista negra*, blacklist of names began to circulate in the region at the same time. In the past those whose names have appeared on such lists have been the target of serious human rights violations by paramilitary organizations. Municipal councillor Gilberto Nieto Patiño, who supported the protests, was killed in November 1998, and in June 1998 an attempt was made on the life of trade unionist Albeiro Forero. The names of both men reportedly appeared on the blacklist.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For many years trade unionists, human rights workers, members of legal opposition groups and popular 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.

Although in 1989 the government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups, they continue to operate with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country. The Attorney General recently said that the security forces had not acted on more than 200 outstanding arrest warrants issued against alleged paramilitary members responsible for widespread human rights violations. So far, the government of Andrés Pastrana, who became president in August 1998, has failed to take effective steps 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 SINTRAMUNICIPIO-Cartago trade unionists;
- urging that all measures deemed appropriate by those under threat be taken to guarantee their security;

- urging that full and impartial investigations are initiated into the death threats against SINTRAMUNICIPIO-Cartago members, the killings of Gilberto Tovar Escudero and Gilberto Nieto Patiño and the reported attempt on Albeiro Forero's life, that the results be made public and that those responsible 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

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

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

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

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, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2022

Salutation: Estimado Dr. / Dear Dr.

Governor of Valle del Cauca Department,

Gustavo Alvarez Gardeazábal
 Gobernador del Departamento de Valle del Cauca
 Gobernación de Valle del Cauca
 Carrera 6ª, Calles 9ª y 10ª, Cali
 Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Faxes: + 572 8898818

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador/ Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Lawyers' Association:

Corporación Colectivo de Abogados
 AA 44456
 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 31 March 1999.