

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/023/2006

16 May 2006

UA 135/06      Fear for safety

COLOMBIA      15 students, teaching and other staff at the University of Antioquia

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A paramilitary group has threatened to kill a group of students, employees and teaching staff at the University of Antioquia, in the department of Antioquia, in the northwest of the country. Amnesty International believes their lives are in danger.

The written death threat was sent to the university on 10 May 2006 and was signed by the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Antioquia* (AUDEA), United Self-Defence Group of Antioquia, which is believed to have been operating since 1999. This group claims to be part of a larger army-backed paramilitary organisation, the *Autodefensas Campesinas de Colombia*, Peasant Self-Defence Group of Colombia.

The letter says that the 15 people named are "active members of the narcoterrorist organizations FARC and ELN [prominent guerrilla organisations] and have been declared military objectives, and they will be killed in any part of the Colombian national territory." ("*Los siguientes individuos miembros activos de las organizaciones narcoterroristas, FARC y ELN han sido declarados objetivo militar, y serán dados de baja en cualquier lugar del territorio colombiano.*")

Two students named in the statement, Gabriel Jaime Bocanumeth Puerta and Víctor Hugo Tobón Mesa, were reportedly beaten up on 3 March 2006 by two men who are paramilitaries. The *Fiscalía* (Attorney General's Office) reportedly began an investigation but abandoned it shortly afterwards.

These two paramilitaries have also reportedly acted as military informants in judicial proceedings against 15 students arrested by the security forces in May 2005 and charged with "subversion". Four of them have been released, and are named on the death list. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of people who have been arrested on charges of "subversion", who have later been released, but are subsequently threatened or killed by paramilitaries.

In March 2006 Colombian newspapers published a series of articles indicating that the security forces believed that the principal guerrilla organisation, the FARC, had begun infiltrating 15 universities. In the past, those whom the paramilitaries have labelled "guerrilla sympathisers" have frequently "disappeared" or been killed by security forces and paramilitary groups.

The full list of names reads: Gabriel Jaime Bocanumeth Puerta, Oscar Mauricio Betancur Hinostrero, Carlos Arturo Posada Vélez, Guillermo León Uribe Blandón, Antonio José Contreras Hernández, Juan Gonzalo Botero Restrepo, Víctor Hugo Tobón Meza, Pedro Pablo Restrepo Arango, Luis Norberto Moreno Lopera, Jorge Osorio, Gildardo de Jesús López Botero, Francisco Javier Cañaveral Vélez, Uber Alberto Cañaveral Usura, Luis Fernando Builes Builes and Carlos Alberto Vides. All are male; it is not known which of them are students and which are university staff.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Although a government-sponsored demobilization of all paramilitary groups has supposedly been underway over the last three years and is drawing to an end this year, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups operating with the cooperation of the security forces in various parts of the country. Recent statements, killings, and threats made by paramilitary organizations make clear that their military structures remain intact.

In recent years, army-backed paramilitaries have killed and threatened members of university trade unions and student activists. These groups have been opposed to government-sponsored reforms of the university system. Guerrilla forces have killed students and university staff whom they accuse of siding with their enemies.

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

- expressing concern that a paramilitary group has threatened to kill a group of students and staff at the University of Antioquia (naming them);
- urging the authorities to take all measures necessary to guarantee their safety, as deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves;
- urging them to order a full and impartial investigation into the assault on Gabriel Jaime Bocanumeth Puerta and Víctor Hugo Tobón Mesa, to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice, in line with the human rights recommendations of the UN;
- calling on the authorities to take decisive action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups still operating in Colombia and to break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 337 5890**

**Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe/ Dear President Uribe**

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, Ministro del Interior y de Justicia, Ministerio del Interior, Av. Jiménez No 8-89, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 560 4630**

**Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro**

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Iguarán, Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación, Diagonal 22B 52-01, Edificio C Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 414 9108**

**Salutation: Dear Dr Iguarán / Estimado Dr. Iguarán**

**COPIES 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 27 June 2006.