

# Colombia

## "You are going to die": Death threats against members of SINTRAEMCALI.

In recent years members of the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de las Empresas Municipales de Cali*, SINTRAEMCALI, Cali Municipal Service Workers Trade Union, have been subject to repeated death threats and attacks carried out by army-backed paramilitary groups. This campaign of threats is taking place at a time when SINTRAEMCALI in Valle del Cauca Department has been campaigning against the privatization of Cali's electricity, water, sewage and telecommunications utilities.

The security forces and their paramilitary allies have often accused trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers. These accusations have frequently been followed by serious human rights violations against trade unionists including killings and "disappearances" carried out by army-backed paramilitaries. In recent months the army-backed paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self Defence Forces of Colombia, declared members of SINTRAEMCALI to be "paramilitary targets".

According to reports from the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Colombian Trade Union Confederation, in the year 2002 over 170 trade unionists were killed, the majority by army-backed paramilitaries.

In February 2002 **Viviana María Villamil** and **Julio Galeano**, her husband, were travelling to work when they were stopped by some men. Julio Galeano was shot dead and Viviana Maria Villami fled in terror of her life. Both were active trade unionists involved in campaigning against the privatisation of Cali's electricity and other utilities.

On 16 June 2002 an attempt was made on the life of the then acting president of SINTRAEMCALI, **Luis Enrique Imbachi**. According to reports, as his car travelled along the *Ciudad de Cali* Avenue, two motorcycles and a taxi followed at speed. After approximately one kilometre, the motorcyclist on the right of Luis Imbachi's car reportedly aimed a revolver at the rear right side of the car, where Luis was seated. Luis reportedly ordered his bodyguard to swerve into the motorcycle, which quickly sped away.

On 3 September 2002 at around 11am, a bomb exploded in a building owned by the *Bodega Navarro de la Gerencia de Acueducto y Alcantarillado*, a publicly-owned company on whose premises SINTRAEMCALI trade unionists hold their meetings. Fortunately at the time of the explosion no one was in the area. After the explosion, leaders of SINTRAEMCALI went to the area to check the damage caused by the bomb. Whilst there, they noticed the presence of an unidentified man on a motorcycle, who was taking photographs and filming them.

Amnesty International is also concerned about alleged reports of a video tape currently said to be in the possession of state security forces. The tape allegedly shows army-backed paramilitaries declaring their intention to carry out attacks on **Alexandre López Maya**,

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Congress representative and former member of SINTRAEMCALI, Luis Hernández, president of SINTRAEMCALI, and other members of the trade union's board.

Recently there has been a marked increase in threatening phone calls received by members of SINTRAEMCALI and their families. **Martha Cecilia Gómez Reyes**, SINTRAEMCALI delegate and wife of Luis Enrique Imbachi, current vice-president of the trade union, has been the target of several of the phone calls. On 22 February 2003 she received a call on her mobile phone in which a man with a mocking laugh threatened her saying "You are going to die" (*Tu vas a morir*). On 3 March a further call was made to her office. On this occasion, the man asked in a questioning tone: "Martha Cecilia Gómez Reyes?" When she then asked who was calling, the answer was: "you are going to die".

**Robinson Masso**, another SINTRAEMCALI leader, has been subjected to intimidating phone calls where the caller remains silent. On 3 March his wife, **Martha Bibiana Giraldo**, received a call saying: "anyway nobody will be saved" (*de todas maneras no se va a salvar ninguno*).

The offices of SINTRAEMCALI have also received death threat phone calls. On 3 March up to three such calls were made to the main switchboard. In one of these calls, the caller stated: "Listen, we are going to kill all of these leaders sons of bitches, and this time it is serious" (*Ve a vos y a todos esos hijos de putas directives los vamos a matar y esta vez es en serio*).

## TAKE ACTION NOW

### Send appeals

- Expressing concern for the safety of SINTRAEMCALI members in Valle del Cauca;
- Asking the authorities what action they will take to guarantee the safety of those at risk, and calling for the Ministry of Interior's protection program for trade unionists to be adequately resourced;
- Calling for a full and impartial investigation into the death threats against and reported attempts on the lives of SINTRAEMCALI members, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- Calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Valle del Cauca Department, and asking that the results of the investigation are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- 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.

### Send them to:

President of the Republic  
Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

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

**Telegram:** Presidente de la República, Bogotá, Colombia  
**Fax:** + 57 1 342 0592  
**Salutation:** Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe / Dear President Uribe

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Fernando Londoño Hoyos,  
Ministro del Interior y de Justicia  
Ministerio del Interior  
Palacio Echeverry, Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram:** Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia  
**Fax:** + 57 1 566 4573  
**Salutation:** Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,  
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,  
Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite),  
Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax:** + 57 1 570 2022 / 2017 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor por Dr. Osorio")  
**Salutation:** Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

**Send appeals to your own government**

- Urging that decisive action is taken by the Colombian authorities to guarantee the security of trade unionists, including members of SINTRAEMCALI, urging full and impartial investigations into reported attempts on their lives and death threats against SINTRAEMCALI members, and urging your government to support the call for an investigating commission at the International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- Urging your government to inform you of what efforts it is taking in this respect.

AI Index: AMR 23/030/2003 PUBLIC