

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/death threats

03 October 2005

COLOMBIA

Samuel Morales, trade union leader

Omayra Morales (f), teacher

Matilde Morales (f), teacher

Gladys Morales (f), teacher

Other members of his family

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] his sisters

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A paramilitary group which is backed by the security forces has reportedly threatened to kill trade union leader Samuel Morales, his sisters Matilde, Omayra and Gladys Morales and other members of his family. Samuel Morales has been in custody since August 2004, on charges of guerrilla activity which appear to be spurious. People charged in this way are often killed after they are released. Amnesty International believes the whole family are in grave danger.

Omayra and Gladys Morales work as teachers at the Juan Jacobo Rousseau School in Arauquita, Arauca department. On 21 September, between 10 and 10.30am, the school secretary received a telephone call from a man who said he was from the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC, Self-Defence Groups of Colombia. He told her, *Díganle a las profesoras Gladys y Omayra Morales que tienen 72 horas para abandonar el departamento, que los que sean familia del señor Samuel Morales son objeto nuestro y que deben desaparecer de Arauca; además que Samuel Morales aun tiene cuentas pendientes con nosotros AUC.* (Tell the teachers Gladys and Omayra Morales that they have 72 hours to leave the department, that members of Mr Samuel Morales's family are our military target and they must disappear from Arauca; further that Samuel Morales has still outstanding debts to pay us, the AUC.)

Their sister Matilde is also a teacher, working at the Gabriel García Márquez school in Arauquita. The secretary there received a similar telephone death threat between 10.30 and 11am. A further threatening call was made to Omayra Morales's house at 6.30pm, by a man who said, *Señora le entregaron a usted, a sus hermanas y a toda la familia de Samuel Morales el recado que les hemos dejado: lo que estamos diciendo no es jugando, sepan que solo son 72 horas y hasta que a su hermanito no le cobremos las cuentas no descansaremos, todo lo que sea familia del señor Samuel Morales debe desaparecer del departamento de Arauca.* ("Lady you have received the message that we left you, your sisters and all Samuel Morales's family: what we are saying is serious it is not a game, you should know you only have 72 hours and that until we have not made your little brother pay his dues we will not rest, all members of Mr Samuel Morales's family must disappear from the department of Arauca.)

Samuel Morales is the president of the Arauca Department branch of a national umbrella organisation of trade unions, the *Confederación Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT, Colombia Trade Union Confederation. He was arrested on 5 August 2004, by soldiers from the XVIII Brigade, and accused of being a guerrilla. Six hours earlier, soldiers from the same unit had forced three other trade unionists out of a house in the Arauca hamlet of Caño Seco, and shot them in the back. The army later claimed that the three had been members of a guerrilla group, and had been shot after they opened fire on troops. Investigations revealed that this was not true. In July 2005 four soldiers and a civilian were charged with killing the three trade unionists, but Samuel Morales has remained in custody. On 3 January 2005 he was charged with *rebelión*, "rebellion". People accused of links with guerrilla organizations, and their families, often receive death threats from paramilitary groups, and may be killed by them. If a court finds that there is no valid evidence against them, paramilitaries may kill them when they are released. On 29 July 2005, while Samuel was in custody at a police station in the Arauca town of Saravena, the station commander reportedly told him that he knew where his sisters worked, and where to find his wife. In the past few weeks, his sisters have reportedly been held up repeatedly at military checkpoints, for many hours. Police officers have reportedly pressured the director of a local hospital to dismiss Samuel's wife simply because she is married to him. Amnesty

International fears that the killing of the three trade unionists, and the arrest of Samuel Morales and harassment of his family, are part of a security forces strategy to undermine the work of trade unionists, human rights defenders and other social activists in Arauca.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Samuel Morales and his family;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the telephone death threats they received on 21 September, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to take action deemed appropriate by the family themselves to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, and asking that the results of the investigation be made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be 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.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 337 5890**

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

Vice-President

Vicepresidente de la República de Colombia

Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón, Vicepresidencia, Carrera 8A No 5-57, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 565 7682**

**Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Vicepresidente/ Dear Vice-President**

Minister of Social Protection (in charge of Health, Labour and Social Security)

Sr. Diego Palacio Betancur, Ministro de Protección Social, Ministerio de Protección Social, Ministerio de Salud, Carrera 13 No 32-76, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: +57 1 336 8007**

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

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental human rights organisation - Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee

Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos,

Calle 26 N4 A-45, Piso 12 Edificio Torre KLM, Bogotá, Colombia

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán, Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación, Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)**

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 14 November 2005.