

PUBLIC

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UA 270/08

Fear for Safety/Death threats

COLOMBIA

Rodolfo Vecino Acevedo (m)

]

Rafael Cabarcas (m)

] members of the Oil Worker's Union *Unión*

Nelsón Berrio (m)

] *Sindical Obrera de la Industria del*

Hernando Hernández (m)

] *Petróleo USO*

Domingo Tovar (m)

] member of the Trade Union Congress (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores, CUT*)

Lenin Fernández (m)

] student leader in the Department of Cesar

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of those named above, following an ongoing campaign of intimidation by paramilitary groups. On 18 September, the Oil Workers' Trade Union (*Unión Sindical Obrera de la Industria del Petróleo USO*) received a death threat via e-mail from the paramilitary group, The Carlos Castaño is Still Alive Eagles (*Águilas Carlos Castaño Vive, CCV*). The death threat warned, "we are reminding you about the death sentences for those son of a bitch guerrillas who still continue screwing around" (*les recuerda las sentencias de muerte a los querilleros (sic.) HP que aun continuan jodiendo*).

The email goes on to accuse the six men of making up the political wing of the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN*). It also informs them that they will "all fall little by little which they deserve for being guerrillas" (*todos caeran poco a poco como se lo merecen por querilleros (sic.)*). In addition to the four members of USO, Domingo Tovar from the Trade Union Congress (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores CUT*) was threatened and the CUT was labelled "the birthplace of terrorists" (*cuna de terroristas*). Lenin Fernández, a student leader in the Department of Cesar was also "sentenced to death" (*sentenciado a muerte*).

On 9 September, two funeral wreaths were sent to USO's offices in Cartagena, which is located on the Northern coast of Colombia in the Department of Bolívar. The wreaths were sent with messages of condolence for Rodolfo Vecino Acevedo who was in the city of Cartagena at the time. Sometime later two different funeral parlours telephoned USO's offices asking for their address because they had more funeral wreaths to send, supposedly at the request of an unidentified female caller. In December 2007, a similar funeral wreath and 'message of condolence' naming Rodolfo Vecino Acevedo had been sent to USO's offices in Barrancamermeja, Department of Santander.

On 1 September, the offices of USO in Cartagena received a telephone call asking for Rodolfo Vecino Acevedo and Rafael Cabarcas. The caller warned that, "they knew that this pair of sons of bitches were in the city and they wanted to kill them" (*que si sabían que estaban en esa ciudad el par de hijos de putas esos y que tenían ganas de matarlos*).

On 18 June, USO and five other organizations working in Barrancabermeja received a written death threat signed by the paramilitary group, the United Black Eagles of Colombia (*Águilas Negras Unidas de Colombia*) (see UA 188/08, 27 June 2008, AMR 23/021/2008). After participating in the May Day marches on 1 May, Rodolfo Vecino Acevedo and Rafael Cabarcas were followed by unknown men to the place where they were staying.

On 31 August 2007, Rodolfo Vecino Acevedo was the victim of a death threat sent via e-mail by the paramilitary group, the United Black Eagles of Colombia (*Águilas Negras Unidas de Colombia*) which warned him that he would “leave behind a widow and four children” (*vas a dejar a una viuda y cuatro hijos*). He had previously received threats from the paramilitary group, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC) in 2005. In November 2006 the bullet-proof car he normally used was shot at by gunmen travelling on two motorcycles. Rodolfo Vecino’s wife, acquaintance and bodyguard, who were in the car at the time, managed to escape unharmed.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States has called on the Colombian authorities to take measures to guarantee the safety of Rodolfo Vecino and his family. Despite this, Rodolfo Vecino Acevedo and other members of USO continue to be at risk.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During Colombia’s 40-year armed conflict, human rights organizations, trade unions and other social organizations have often been labelled as guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and paramilitaries. As a result they often suffer threats, enforced disappearance or killings. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders they consider to be siding with the enemy.

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

- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of Rodolfo Vecino Acevedo, Rafael Cabarcas, Nelsón Berrio, Hernando Hernández and other members of USO as well as Domingo Tovar and Lenin Fernández, using all measures deemed appropriate by those at risk;
- calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into the threats, the results of which should be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for decisive action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups and investigate and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations;
- calling on the authorities to produce policy and plans, in conjunction with human rights defenders, to guarantee their safety according to the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and to make these plans public.

APPEALS TO:

President

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: Dear President Uribe/Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe

Minister of Defence

Dr. Juan Manuel Santos

Avenida El Dorado, Carrera 52 OFI. 217, Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN), Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 266 1003 (ask for fax tone: me da tono de fax por favor)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Santos/Estimado Dr. Santos

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C, Piso 4, Bogotá, Colombia

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

Salutation: Dear Mr Iguarán/ Estimado Sr. Fiscal

COPIES TO:

USO NACIONAL
Calle 38 No. 13-37 Of. 302, 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 03 November 2008.