

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

27 August 2003

COLOMBIA

**Juan Carlos Galvis (m), Vice-president of the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos*, (SINALTRAINAL), National Union of Food Industry Workers Barrancabermeja section;
Other SINALTRAINAL members**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Juan Carlos Galvis, vice-president of the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos*, (SINALTRAINAL), National Union of Food Industry Workers, Barrancabermeja section, following reports of a recent attempt on his life.

At 12:10 pm, on 22 August, Juan Carlos Galvis was travelling in a bullet-proof vehicle through the neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, in the city of Barrancabermeja, Santander Department, when an unidentified man shot at his vehicle twice. Juan Carlos' body-guards, who at that time were with him in the vehicle, returned fire. The gunman was able to escape on a motorbike.

The attack follows a public statement in March, by *Muerte a sindicalistas* (MASIN), Death to Trade Unionists, a possible paramilitary group, which declared its intention to kill trade union leaders and social activists in Barrancabermeja.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Barrancabermeja is under siege by army-backed paramilitaries who control entire areas of the city, despite the large presence of the security forces. Trade unionists have frequently been harassed, tortured and killed, the majority by army-backed paramilitaries who together with the security forces, have often accused trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or their auxiliaries. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for killing and threatening those they accuse of collaborating with their enemies.

SINALTRAINAL members have faced numerous human rights violations and death threats in recent years. In February 2002, the headquarters of the SINALTRAINAL offices in Cali, Valle del Cauca Department, was shot at. (See UA 59/02, AMR 23/026/2002, 25 February 2002). In April 2002, Diofanol Sierra Vargas, a SINALTRAINAL leader was reportedly shot by paramilitaries in Barrancabermeja (See UA 111/02, AMR 23/039/2002, 11 April 2002). In June 2002, an attempt was made to kidnap the daughter of SINALTRAINAL president, William Mendoza Gómez, in Barrancabermeja (See UA 192/02, AMR 23/067/2002, 25 June 2002).

The *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia* (CUT), Colombian Trade Union Congress, estimates that in 2002, at least 172 affiliated trade unionists were victims of extrajudicial executions in Colombia. One hundred and sixty four received death threats, 26 were victims of kidnapping, 17 were victims of an attempted kidnapping, seven were forcibly displaced, 132 were arbitrarily detained and around 80 sought exile. According to the CUT, these violations are a direct consequence of their trade union activity. More than 35 trade unionists have been killed in Colombia so far this year.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Juan Carlos Galvis, other SINALTRAINAL members and trade unionists in Barrancabermeja, Santander Department;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the attempted killing of Juan Carlos Galvis, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- acknowledging that some protection measures have been provided by the Ministry of the Interior but calling for further measures deemed appropriate by those under threat to be taken to guarantee their safety;

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Santander 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.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 337 58 90 / 342 0592

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

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

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,

Fiscal General de la Nación

Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B 52-01

Santafé de 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

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental Human Rights Organization

CREDHOS

AA 505

Barrancabermeja

Santander, 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 8 October 2003.