

UA 192/02

Fear for

COLOMBIA William Mendoza Gómez (m), President of the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos*, (SINALTRAINAL), National Union of Food Industry Workers Barrancabermeja section;
Karen Mendoza Díaz (f) his four year old daughter;
Luz Esther Díaz (f), his wife;
And other SINALTRAINAL members and their families

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of William Mendoza Gómez, President of the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos*, (SINALTRAINAL), National Union of Food Industry Workers - Barrancabermeja section, and his family following a reported kidnapping attempt against his young daughter.

On 18 June at around 2:45pm, three unidentified men reportedly attempted to snatch William's four year old daughter, Karen, from her mother's arms. Luz Esther Díaz was speaking to her husband at the time, from a public phone box in the Parque de la Constitución, in the commercial centre of Barrancabermeja, Department of Santander. The moment the men tried to grab the little girl, Luz reportedly screamed for help and struggled with one of them, who let go of Karen upon seeing two police officers approaching.

William Mendoza Gómez, works at the Santander Bottling Plant in Barrancabermeja and together with other SINALTRAINAL leaders has been the victim of death threats. As such, the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has called on the Colombian government to guarantee the safety of William Mendoza Gómez. He has reportedly been receiving the protection of the Colombian Ministry of Interior.

The attempted kidnapping of William's daughter comes at a time when SINALTRAINAL has initiated a law suit in the United States regarding alleged human rights violations by paramilitaries against trade unionists working in bottling plants contracted by the Coca-Cola Company.

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, often by paramilitaries who together with the security and armed forces have often accused trade unionists, of being guerrilla sympathizers. On 20 June, Helio Rodríguez Ruiz, leader of the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria Gastronómica, Hotelera y Similares*, (HOCAR), National Union of Catering and Hotel workers was killed by unidentified gunmen on his way to work in Barrancabermeja.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) recorded that in 2001 alone, over 160 trade unionists were murdered, and that harassment and violence is widespread. According to reports from the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Colombian Trade Union Confederation, so far this year some 87 trade unionists have been killed the majority by army-backed paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of William Mendoza Gómez, his family, other SINALTRAINAL members and their families in Barrancabermeja, Santander Department;
- acknowledge that some protection measures have been provided by the Ministry of the Interior but urge that further measures deemed appropriate by those under threat must be taken to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the attempted kidnapping of Karen Mendoza Díaz, 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 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 Colombia

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

Telegram: President Pastrana, Bogota, Colombia

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 334 1323

Salutation: Dear President Pastrana / Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente Pastrana

(NB: Andrés Pastrana is the President until 7 August when President-elect Dr. Alvaro Uribe takes office.)

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Armando Estrada Villa,
Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior,
Palacio Echeverry, Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.,
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 562 5298 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Apartado Aéreo 29855, Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite),
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Fiscal General, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 / 2017 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights

La Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (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 6 August 2002.