

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 23/80/94
Distr: UA/SC

UA 379/94

Death Threats / Fear for Safety

21 October 1994

COLOMBIA

Gustavo SUAREZ NIÑO, priest, mayoral candidate

Father Gustavo Suárez Niño is being subjected to death threats by Colsingue, a paramilitary group which may have links with the Colombian security forces.

There are serious fears for his safety given that Colsingue is believed to have been responsible for many killings.

Father Gustavo Suárez has worked for nearly 20 years as priest and teacher in the town of Sogamoso, Boyacá department, and the surrounding villages and is well known for his community and pastoral work. He recently decided to stand as candidate for the position of Mayor of Sogamoso in the forthcoming elections, as representative of the civic movement "United for Sogamoso" ("*Unidos por Sogamoso*").

Since announcing his candidature several weeks ago, pamphlets have been distributed in the town, accusing Father Gustavo Suárez of being "an ideologue and rabble-rouser" ("*ideólogo y concientizador*") for an armed opposition group.

Graffiti has also appeared in Sogamoso with slogans such as "Colsingue is here, Sogamoso without priests!" ("*Colsingue presente, Sogamoso sin curas*") and "Sogamoso, I love you without priests, Colsingue lives!" ("*Sogamoso te amo sin curas, Colsingue vive!*"). Colsingue is the name of a recently-formed paramilitary group, whose declared aim is to wage war against all those they consider to have associations with armed opposition groups within the country.

These include political and trade union activists and many have since been killed.

Two youths were reportedly caught painting the graffiti against Father Gustavo Suárez, but were later released by Sogamoso's deputy police inspector. The fact that the men were freed without apparent further investigation into the threats has heightened Amnesty International's concern for the safety of Father Gustavo Suárez.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years, widespread and systematic human rights violations have occurred in Colombia, including "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution. President Ernesto Samper Pizano, who assumed office on 7 August 1994, has made commitments to improve the human rights situation. However the Colombian armed forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit abuses with impunity. Many paramilitary groups have their origins in the civilian "self-defence" squads which the army created in the 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombia armed forces to combat and disband such groups, paramilitary forces have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents with impunity in many areas of the country and continue to work with the support of the security forces.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the threats, in the form of pamphlets and graffiti,

against father Gustavo Suárez Niño;

- urging that these be immediately and thoroughly investigated, the results made public and those found responsible brought to justice;

- urging that all possible measures be taken to protect father Gustavo Suárez Niño, so that he can carry out his lawful activities without fear for his life;

- urging, furthermore, that immediate steps be taken to dismantle all paramilitary forces in accordance with President Samper's electoral promises and that full and impartial investigations be undertaken into links between paramilitary and security forces, the results of which should be made public.

APPEALS TO

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

2) Procurator General:

Dr. Orlando Vásquez Velásquez

Procurador General de la Nación

Procuraduría General

Edificio Banco Ganadero

Carrera 5, No. 15-80

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General Vasquez, Bogotá,

Faxes:+ 57 1 342 9723/281 7531

Salutation:Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Vásquez

3) Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento

Fiscal General de la Nación

Fiscalía General de la Nación

Apartado Aéreo 29855

Santafé de Bogotá

Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 287 0939 or 288 2828

Salutation: Estimado Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso

4) Minister of Defence

Dr. Fernando Botero Zea

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Ministro de Defensa Botero, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes:42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes:+ 57 1 222 1874/288 4906/228 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace
Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz
AA 31861, Santafé de 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 2 December 1994.