

UA 227/01

Fear for**COLOMBIA** Alvaro Laiton Cortes (m), teacher and trade union leader

Teacher Alvaro Laiton Cortes was reportedly abducted by gunmen thought to be army-backed paramilitaries, in Boyacá Department, on 8 September. His whereabouts are now unknown, and Amnesty International is seriously concerned for his safety.

Alvaro Laiton Cortes, who teaches social sciences at the *Pio Laberto Ferro de Chinchiquira* school, is the leader of the Boyacá teachers' union.

Four heavily-armed men reportedly stopped the taxi in which he was travelling, on the road **from** Saboyá **to** Chinchiquira, and forced him into their car. His abductors are thought to be members of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Teachers have frequently been the victim of human rights violations committed by army-backed paramilitary forces who accuse them of sympathizing or collaborating with guerrilla forces. Guerrilla groups have also killed and threatened teachers they accuse of sympathizing with the security forces or their paramilitary allies.

The security forces and their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. Those they accuse are frequently harassed, tortured and killed. At least 112 trade unionists were murdered during 2000, the majority by army-backed paramilitaries. According to the Colombian Trade Union Confederation (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT), 93 trade union activists have been killed so far this year. In December 2000, a senior trade union leader, Wilson Borja Díaz, had to flee the country after he was shot and wounded by gunmen (see UA 387/00, AMR 23/104/00, 21 December 2000). Judicial investigations have linked several active and retired police officers to the attack.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Alvaro Laiton Cortes, who was reportedly abducted by paramilitaries on 8 September between the municipalities of Saboyá and Chinchiquira, department of Boyacá, and whose whereabouts are now unknown;
- urging the authorities to do everything possible to find out where he is and guarantee his safety;
- expressing concern for the safety of other teachers and members of teachers' unions, and urging the authorities to do everything deemed appropriate by the union members themselves to guarantee their safety;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic  
Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango  
Presidente de la República  
Palacio de Nariño  
Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá  
COLOMBIA

**Faxes: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351/286 74 34/ 286 68 42/284 21 86**

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

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Armando Estrada Villa

Ministerio del Interior

Palacio Echeverry

Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.

Santafé de Bogotá,

COLOMBIA

**Faxes: + 57 1 562 5298/ 562 9890**

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

Governor of the Department of Boyacá

Sr. Oscar Eduardo Riaño Alonso

Gobernador del Departamento de Boyacá

Gobernación de Boyacá

Tunja, Boyacá, COLOMBIA

**Fax: +57 8 742 6540**

**Salutation: Dear Governor / Sr. Gobernador**

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental organisation

Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos

AA 22803

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 22 October 2001.