

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/031/2005

UA 250/05

Fear for safety/Death threats

23 September 2005

COLOMBIA

**José Onofre Esquivel Luna (m), member of the National Union of Food Industry Workers (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos*, SINALTRAINAL)
Other SINALTRAINAL members**

Killed:

Luciano Enrique Romero Molina (m)

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of José Onofre Esquivel Luna, leader of the Bugalagrande Branch of the National Union of Food Industry Workers trade union (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos*, SINALTRAINAL) in Valle del Cauca department. In recent weeks his home has been under surveillance by unknown armed men. Concerns for his safety are also raised following the recent killing of Luciano Enrique Romero Molina, another SINALTRAINAL member in Valledupar, Cesar department.

In the past, trade unionists have been kept under surveillance in advance of attempts on their lives by army-backed paramilitaries. On 12 September, a white car was seen driving around José Onofre Esquivel's house. A week later, on 19 September, an armed man was seen prowling around the house in the municipality of Bugalagrande. His neighbours have also reportedly been asked about his whereabouts on a number of occasions by people he did not know.

José Onofre Esquivel has previously been declared a military target by army-backed paramilitaries from the Centre of Valle Cauca Bloc (*Centro del Valle del Cauca Bloc*) of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC). On 11 October 2003, he found a written death threat in his locker at the company where he works. The death threat was addressed to José Onofre Esquivel and his trade union colleagues, Rogelio Sanchez, Alfonso Espinosa and Freddy Ocoro. Fearing for his safety, Freddy Ocoro had to flee the country.

Concerns for the safety of SINALTRAINAL members have been raised in Colombia following the recent killing of one of its leaders. On 11 September, Luciano Enrique Romero Molina's body was found with his hands tied and more than forty stab wounds, in the La Nevada neighbourhood of Valledupar, Cesar Department. The area is reportedly under the control of army-backed paramilitaries.

Luciano Enrique Romero Molina was a member of SINALTRAINAL and the non-governmental human rights organization, Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee (*Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos*, CSPP). In October 2002, he and other colleagues were reportedly sacked from their jobs at the company where they worked in Valledupar during a labour dispute. Luciano Enrique Romero Molina was threatened by paramilitary groups and forced to flee his home and then the country, before returning to Colombia in April 2005.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The human rights situation faced by trade unionists in Colombia remains critical. The vast majority of human rights abuses against trade unionists are committed by army-backed paramilitaries and the security forces. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for a number of human rights abuses against trade unionists in recent years.

Many human rights violations against trade unionists take place in the course of labour disputes. Trade unionists are frequently labelled subversives by the security forces and their paramilitary allies and these accusations are frequently followed by serious human rights violations.

Due to their activities trade unionists are victims of killings, "disappearances" and death threats. According to trade union reports 37 trade unionists have been killed in Colombia 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 José Onofre Esquivel Luna, other SINALTRAINAL members and trade unionists in Colombia;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the killing Luciano Enrique Romero Molina, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for the Colombian authorities to implement measures deemed appropriate by those under threat to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups, 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.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 337 5890

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

Vice-President

Vicepresidente de la República de Colombia
Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón
Vicepresidencia, Carrera 8A No 5-57, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 565 7682

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Vicepresidente/ Dear Vice-President

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

COPIES TO:

National Union of Food Industry Workers;

SINALTRAINAL
Carrera 15 No 35-18, Barrio Teusaquillo
Bogotá, Colombia

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Bogotá, Colombia

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

Salutation: Dear Dr. Iguarán / Estimado Dr. Iguarán

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 4 November 2005