

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/032/2005

UA 257/05

Fear for safety / Death threats

28 September 2005

COLOMBIA

Mario de Jesús Castañeda (m) a leader of the Huila branch of the Colombian Trade Union Confederation (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT)

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Mario de Jesús Castañeda, a leader of the Huila branch of the Colombian Trade Union Confederation (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT), following a recent death threat against him.

On 22 September, a letter addressed to Mario Jesús Castañeda was sent to the CUT offices in Neiva, Huila department. The typed letter was signed by the Bolívar Central Bloc (*Bloque Central Bolívar*), of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC). The letter said: "Today we remind you that for some time you have been annoying us with your vulgarity against the government." ... "We are in the peace process in this area where we are active, when we have the opportunity, we will accomplish what we have said we would do to characters like you and other revolutionary trade unionists that are slandering each government we have as well as respectable people"... For the moment we will continue to act in good order but in an effective way and we will not stop until we see this area in peace and clean of people like you. Leave, shut up or we will act".

"Hoy estamos recordándole que desde hace tiempo nos molesta con su grosería atacando al gobierno"... "Nosotros vamos con el proceso de paz en esta zona donde actuamos pero antes o así nos toque después haremos cumplir lo que le hemos dicho o reclamando a personajes como usted y otros revolucionarios sindicalistas como usted que son gusanos habladores calumniadores contra cada gobierno que tenemos y gente de bien"... Al momento seguiremos actuando en mejor orden pero de manera efectiva en la zona... que no dejaremos hasta verla en paz y libre de gente como ustedes"... Se va, se calla o actuamos".

On 20 September, Mario de Jesús Castañeda was reportedly searched by members of the police at the coach station in Neiva. He was detained for approximately 50 minutes during which time the police reportedly photocopied the documents he was carrying. The documents reportedly contained information about the alleged rape of a woman by the paramilitaries, which Mario de Jesús Castañeda was collecting before presenting a formal complaint to the authorities. Concerns for his safety are heightened by the fact that in the past, those who have reported human rights violations by the security forces or their paramilitary allies have frequently been the target of serious human rights violations.

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 Mario de Jesús Castañeda, president of the Huila branch of the Colombian Trade Union Confederation (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT);
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the recent threat against his life, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for the Colombian authorities to implement all measures deemed appropriate by Mario de Jesús Castañeda and the CUT to guarantee his safety and that of the other members of the CUT in Huila;
- 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 and to break their links with security forces.

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

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

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los derechos humanos – Capítulo Huila
Carrera 2 No 23-41 Oficina 301
Neiva, 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 9 November 2005