

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/63/99

UA 229/99

Fear for Safety

1 September 1999

COLOMBIA

José Domingo Tovar, director of human rights at the national Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), Trade Union Confederation.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the trade unionist José Domingo Tovar, who was shot at by police on the evening of 31 August 1999, in what the government claims was a case of mistaken identity.

The attack occurred outside the headquarters of the *Federación Colombiana de Educadores* (FECODE), Colombian Teachers' Federation, where José Domingo Tovar was going to take part in meetings. José Domingo Tovar has long been the target of death threats, and has been assigned bodyguards by the government's *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (DAS), Civilian Intelligence Service. One of his bodyguards was injured in the attack.

One hour after the attack, the Colombian government acknowledged that members of the National Police *Servicio de Investigaciones Judiciales e Inteligencia* (SIJIN), Judicial Investigation and Intelligence Service, had opened fire on José Domingo Tovar and his bodyguards, but said they had done so mistaking them for armed criminals.

The shooting took place on the first day of a national strike coordinated by the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Trade Union Confederation. More than 20 trade unions reported that they had experienced threats and harassment during the period leading up to the strike. During a similar strike in 1998 a number of trade unionists were killed and many more received death threats.

There were disturbances in many parts of the country as demonstrations were broken up by the security forces. Many protesters and their supporters were reportedly detained.

José Domingo Tovar has only recently taken on the position of director of human rights at the CUT. The previous director, Jesús Gonzalez Luna, suffered an attempt on his life on 1 August 1999 (see UA 179/99, AMR 23/55/99) and has since left the country.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Trade unionists, human rights workers and other civic activists are often targeted for human rights violations by the security forces and their paramilitary allies.

Amnesty International has documented systematic persecution of trade unionists. Seven trade union leaders were shot dead during the 1998 national strike, including CUT vice-president Jorge Ortega Garcia (see UA 274/98, AMR 23/80/98, 21 October 1998, and follow up). CUT activists in the municipality of Cartago, also in Valle del Cauca department, have also been systematically killed and intimidated (UA 150/98, AMR 23/29/98, 13 May 1999 and follow-ups). Seventy two trade union leaders were killed in 1997. None of these crimes has been resolved and those responsible have not been brought to justice.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of José Domingo Tovar and other national trade union leaders and activists;
- urging the authorities to take all measures deemed necessary by those at risk to guarantee their safety;
- calling for full, prompt and impartial investigations into the attempt on the life of José Domingo Tovar, particularly the involvement of members of the SIJIN, for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice.

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

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/ 284 2186/ 337 1351

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/ Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Néstor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministerio del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Fax: + 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5884 / 342 3201

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Procurator General:

Dr. Jaime Bernal Cuellar, Procurador General de la Nación
Procuraduría General, Edificio Banco Ganadero
Carrera 5, No. 15-80, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 342 9723/281 7531/284 0472

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

COPIES TO:

CUT (Trade Union Confederation)

Calle 35 N° 7-25, Piso 9

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 13 October 1999.