

UA 288/99

Fear for

COLOMBIA Arturo Ocampo] leaders of the trade union
Carlos Zapata] SINTRAOFAN
Other SINTRAOFAN members

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of members of the *Sindicato de Trabajadores Oficiales de Antioquia* (SINTRAOFAN), Union of Official Workers of Antioquia, particularly the union's leaders Arturo Ocampo and Carlos Zapata. Union members have received death threats, and a threat to bomb their headquarters, but police have ignored requests for protection.

An anonymous caller to the trade union's headquarters threatened to blow up its offices, in the Suramericana building in Medellín, department of Antioquia, in September 1999. Since then requests for police protection for the union offices have not been answered. Trade union leaders told Amnesty International representatives that they felt they had "*un pie aquí y un pie en el cementerio*", "one foot here and one in the cemetery".

National paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño is reported to have stated recently that two members of the union's executive committee were guerrillas. In the past those labelled guerrillas or guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies have frequently been victim of serious human rights violations .

The bomb threat follows the killing of one union leader and death threats against others. Humberto Herrera Gallego, who worked in the union's Puerto Rico branch, was killed on 13 August 1999, reportedly by paramilitary forces under the command of Carlos Castaño. That month a written death threat was sent to the Ciudad Bolívar branch of the union signed by the *Bloque Metro Suroeste Antioqueño*, Southwest Antioquia Metro Front, a paramilitary group whose leader is known as "René". The message warned members of the branch's executive committee that if they did not resign they would be declared military targets and killed. "René" has reportedly threatened to attack trade unions in the region until "*No quede un solo sindicato*", "not one trade union remains"; he also apparently said that trade unions should vanish and if not the paramilitaries would kill their members.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For many years, trade unionists, human rights workers, members of legal opposition groups and popular activists in Colombia have been accused of being guerrilla sympathisers or auxiliaries by the security and armed forces and their paramilitary allies. Such accusations have frequently been followed by serious human rights violations, often perpetrated by paramilitary forces.

Amnesty International has documented systematic persecution of trade unionists in Colombia. Seven trade union leaders were shot dead during the 1998 national strike, including Jorge Ortega Garcia, vice-president of the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Trade Union Congress (see UA 274/98, AMR 23/80/98, 21 October 1998, and follow up, AMR 23/90/98, 24 November 1998). CUT activists in the municipality of Cartago, also in Valle del Cauca department, have also been systematically killed or 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 Arturo Ocampo, Carlos Zapata and other leaders of SINTRAOFAN;
- 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 reported death threats against SINTRAOFAN members and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Antioquia, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organisations

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

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 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

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez,
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Diagonal 22B 5201, Apartado Aéreo 29855, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2022 (If the call is answered, say "Fax, por favor" and wait for the signal).

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Gómez / Dear Dr. Gómez

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 16 December 1999.