

UA 222/2001

Fear for**COLOMBIA Jorge Pungo**

Edgar Pua  
Angel Salas  
Judith Castillo  
Robert Alvarino  
Argemiro Rivaldo  
Carlos Bustamente  
Ubaldo Galindo  
José Meriño  
Arminton Sarmiento  
Gustavo Villanueva

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**Other members of the ANTHOC trade union in Cauca and Atlántico**

Trade unionist Carmen Pungo and her cousin Ricaurte Yanten Pungo were reportedly killed by army-backed paramilitaries on 2 September. They were abducted on 2 September near their homes in Tambo, Cauca Department, in south-west Colombia, and allegedly taken to meet with local paramilitary leaders. Their bodies were found later that day by local villagers. Carmen Pungo was a member of the health workers' union ANTHOC, and other trade unionists in the region are feared to be in danger.

Carmen Pungo worked at the *Santa María del Tambo* hospital in Tambo. She had been abducted on 28 July, together with her brother, Jorge Pungo, and taken to meet with paramilitary leaders, who accused them of having links with guerrillas. The paramilitaries reportedly threatened to torture and kill them, and to kill Carmen's children if she left the area. They also demanded one million pesos (approximately US\$500).

She was a member of the *Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores y Empleados de Hospitales, Clínicas, Consultorios y Entidades Dedicadas a Procurar la Salud de la Comunidad* (ANTHOC), (National Association of Workers and Employees of Hospitals, Clinics, Consultancies, and Organizations Dedicated to the Provision of Community Health). ANTHOC members have faced increasing death threats in Cauca department, where army-backed paramilitaries are increasing their military presence. This killing raises concerns for the safety of other ANTHOC members in the municipality of Tambo and the region as a whole.

ANTHOC leaders in Barranquilla, in the northern department of Atlántico, are also reported to have been threatened in recent months. On 17 August Gustavo Villanueva received written death threats accusing him of guerrilla links, and an anonymous caller told one of his daughters that he would be killed. Edgar Pua and Jose Meriño received written death threats which gave them 12 hours to leave the city. Three heavily armed men confronted the wife of ANTHOC-Atlántico president Arminton Sarmiento at their home and told her that Arminton had 12 hours to renounce his trade union membership and leave the country or be killed. As a result of these threats, the following ANTHOC-Atlántico trade unionists have been forced to flee the area: Edgar Pua, Angel Salas, Judith Castillo, Robert Alvarino, Argemiro Rivaldo, Carlos Bustamente, Ubaldo Galindo, José Meriño and Arminto Sarmiento.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The security forces and their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries, and frequently harass, torture and kill them. 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. Increasing attacks on and threats to health workers have come at a time when many public sector workers are campaigning against economic reforms and proposals to privatise the health service.

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

- calling for an immediate, impartial and full investigation into the assassination of Carmen Pungo and her cousin Ricaurte Yanten Pungo, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective action to guarantee the safety of Jorge Pungo and other members of Carmen Pungo's family, the trade unionists named above, and other members of ANTHOC in Cauca and Atlántico Departments;
- calling for the paramilitary threats against ANTHOC union activists to be investigated, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- asking the authorities what measures, deemed appropriate by those at risk, they are going to take to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- 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 Andrés Pastrana Arango  
 Presidente de la República  
 Palacio de Nariño  
 Carrera 8 No.7-26  
 Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

**Fax: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351**

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

Minister of Interior

Sr. Armando Estrada Villa  
 Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Palacio Echeverry  
 Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o., Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia**

**Fax: + 57 1 341 9583 / 334 3960**

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

Governor of Cauca department

Sr. Floro Alberto Tunubalá Paja  
 Gobernación de Cauca  
 Carrera 7, Calle 4<sup>a</sup>, piso 3  
 Popayán, Cauca, COLOMBIA

**Fax: +57 2 824 2121**

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

Governor of Atlántico department

Sr. Ventura Emilio Díaz Mejía  
 Gobernación de Atlántico  
 Calle 40, No. 45-46

Barranquilla, Atlántico, COLOMBIA

**Fax: +57 5 341 0062**

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

**COPIES TO:**

Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia

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 17 October 2001.