

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

28 October 2002

COLOMBIA **Cristóbal Guamanga (m), member of *Sindicato de pequeños y medianos agricultores del Cauca* (SIMPEAGRIC), Trade Union of Small and Medium Farmers of Cauca**
Other peasant farmer activists and trade unionists in Cauca department

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Cristóbal Guamanga, a member of the *Sindicato de pequeños y medianos agricultores del Cauca*, (SIMPEAGRIC), Trade Union of Small and Medium Farmers of Cauca. Cristóbal Guamanga, from the municipality of Miranda in Cauca department, has reportedly been threatened by armed men, thought to be members of army-backed paramilitary groups operating in the region. The threats raise concerns for the safety of other peasant farmer activists and trade unionists in the department.

On 17 October two men carrying guns allegedly arrived at Cristóbal Guamanga's house, demanding to know his whereabouts : "*lo andamos buscando*", ("we are looking for him"). When they did not find him at home the gunmen visited the houses of other members of the trade union where they threatened Cristóbal Guamanga: "*Cristóbal se salvó, pero no es por mucho tiempo*", ("Cristóbal has saved himself, but not for long"). The gunmen left written death threats for Cristóbal Guamanga at his colleagues' houses.

The death threats against Cristóbal Guamanga have raised concerns for the safety of the members of SIMPEAGRIC and other social activists in the department of Cauca. Cristóbal Guamanga was reportedly one of the organizers of the rural strike in Cauca on 16 September 2002. The strike was labelled as a guerrilla-organized protest by high-ranking members of the security forces and senior political figures.

In the past, those accused by the security forces of being guerrilla collaborators have frequently been the victim of serious human rights violations carried out by the paramilitary forces. In Cauca, accusations against participants in the strike of being guerrilla collaborators coincided with a paramilitary death threat issued by the *Bloque Calima*, Calima Block of the *Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá* (ACCU), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, on 7 September. The death threat, in the form of a communique to the media, was also received by several social organizations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 16 September, rural peasant communities and agricultural communities across Colombia have been mobilizing in protest over a number of diverse issues. These include the government's agricultural policies, transnational corporations' influence on Colombian agriculture, the destruction of national food sovereignty and the loss of biodiversity. They are also protesting about the continued killing and "disappearance" of peasant farmers, and the forced displacement of peasant communities as a result of the armed conflict in Colombia.

The strike action coincides with the continued build-up of paramilitary groups in Cauca department, which have been able to operate in the region despite the heavy presence of the security forces. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for killing and threatening numerous civilians they consider to be collaborating with their enemies, including mayors and other municipal officials.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Cristóbal Guamanga and other members of the SIMPEAGRIC trade union;
- urging the authorities to order an independent, impartial and conclusive investigation into the threats against Cristóbal Guamanga, and for those

responsible to be brought to justice;

- asking the authorities what measures, deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves, they are going to take to guarantee the safety of Cristóbal Guamanga and other members of SIMPEAGRIC, as well as other peasant farmer activists and trade unionists in the department under threat;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Cauca, urging that the results 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 repeated United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 Carrera 8 No. 7-26
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Uribe, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 566 20 71/ 576 20 78

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Fernando Londoño Hoyos,
 Ministro del Interior y de Justicia
 Ministerio del Interior
 Palacio Echeverry, Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia Fax: + 57 1 566 4573

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite)
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Fiscal General, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 / 2017 (if someone answers say Ame da tono de fax por favor@)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization
 Inter-congregational Commission Justice and Peace
 Comisión Intercongregacional De Justicia y Paz
 AA 31.861
 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 9 December 2002.