

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety / "disappearance"

COLOMBIA

Silvio Saúl Suárez Sandoval (m)

Silvio Saúl Suárez Sandoval has not been seen since the night of 24 April. His whereabouts are unknown and it is feared that he may have "disappeared". Amnesty International is seriously concerned for his safety.

On 24 April at 10pm Silvio Saúl Suárez Sandoval left his betting shop in the hamlets of El Tambo y El Bordo in Popayán municipality, Cauca department and got in his car to travel home to the neighbourhood of Campamento in the same municipality. He never arrived home, and his current whereabouts are unknown.

His failure to return home led his family to inform the *Cuerpo Técnico de Investigación de la Fiscalía* (CTI), Technical Investigation Body of the Attorney General's Office about his "disappearance". On the morning of 25 April, police found Silvio Saúl Suárez Sandoval's car abandoned in the hamlet of Santa Bárbara, four kilometres away from the centre of Popayán. Inside the car the police found a cap and an identity bracelet usually worn by members of the civilian intelligence service, the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*, (DAS), Department of Administrative Security.

On 25 April, Silvio Saúl Suarez Sandoval's family reported the disappearance to the GAULA, Special Anti-Kidnapping Group and to the Immediate Reaction Unit of the Attorney General's Office in Popayán. The family also contacted the non-governmental human rights organization *Reiniciar* who informed the Minister of Interior and the National Procurator about the "disappearance". *Reiniciar* has not yet received a reply from any of these institutions.

Silvio Saúl Suarez Sandoval had reportedly received threats from army-backed paramilitary groups in recent months. In mid-December 2002 a man identifying himself as a member of the Calima Group of the army-backed paramilitary organization *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self Defence Forces of Colombia telephoned Silvio Saúl Suárez Sandoval at his office and demanded that he pay one million Colombian pesos (US\$350) monthly. Silvio Saúl Suárez Sandoval refused, but continued to be threatened by the paramilitary group. In one such threat, the paramilitaries told him that if he did not pay they would attack his son, who they knew was studying in Bogotá.

Silvio Saúl Suárez is also a member of the Colombian Communist Party, whose members and activists have frequently been labelled guerrilla sympathizers and collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Such accusations have frequently been followed by serious human rights violations including extrajudicial executions and "disappearances".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There has been a continued consolidation of army-backed paramilitary group operations in Cauca department, despite the heavy presence of the security forces. Guerrilla groups have also carried out numerous threats and killings of civilians, including mayors and other municipal officials, they consider to be collaborating with their enemies.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Silvio Saúl Suárez Sandoval, who has not been seen since 24 April;
- urging the authorities to do everything necessary to find him;

- calling for full and impartial investigations into possible links between the security forces and paramilitaries in the department of Cauca, with the results made public and those members of the security forces responsible for collaborating with or supporting paramilitary forces brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that if they fail to protect the civilian population, it will seem that the paramilitaries are operating with the complicity of the security forces;
- expressing concern at the continued large-scale presence of paramilitary forces in Cauca despite the heavy military presence in the department and urging immediate decisive action to confront and dismantle these groups, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Presidente de la República, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 342 0592/ 337 58 90

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

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: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,

Fiscal General de la Nación

Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B 52-01

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Fiscal General, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 /2017 if someone answers say “me da tono de fax por favor por Dr Osorio”)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

Reiniciar

AA 16284

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 11 June 2003.