

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/075/2003

16 October 2003

UA 293/03 Fear for safety/Death threats

COLOMBIA Trade unionists and local election candidates for *Frente Social y Político*, Social and Political Front, in Risaralda department

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of trade unionists and local election candidates for the political party *Frente Social y Político*, Social and Political Front, in the department of Risaralda, after they were threatened by army-backed paramilitary groups.

On 6 October, a death threat was reportedly sent by fax to the office of the *Sindicato de Educadores de Risaralda* (SER), Union of Risaralda Teachers, in the town of Pereira, Risaralda department. The threat was allegedly signed by the *Bloque Cacique Calarcá*, Cacique Calarcá Bloc, a regional branch of the army-backed paramilitary group of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia.

According to reports, the death threat ordered trade unionists belonging to SER, the departmental leadership of the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Colombian Trade Union Confederation, the street traders' association and *Unimotor*, the trade union of transport drivers and workers to resign their posts and leave the town before 10 October or be declared "military targets" (*"objetivo militar"*). The threat also said that the local election candidates for *Frente Social y Político* would also be declared military targets because "local bodies are already full of rats without an additional plague of trade unionists and communists joining in" (*"ya que las corporaciones bastante manada de ratas sustentan para que se adjunten más plagas sindicales y comunistas"*).

Among the candidates for the elections that are scheduled to be held on 26 October, at least 25 have reportedly been killed in violent circumstances in Colombia as a whole and another 88 may have withdrawn their candidature due to the death threats. Army-backed paramilitaries and guerrilla forces were allegedly behind many of these incidents.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights defenders, trade unionists and members of left-wing political opposition groups have frequently been labelled subversives by the security forces and their paramilitary allies, and have been the target of serious human rights violations at the hands of the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for threats and killings of members of political parties and other civilians they accuse of siding and collaborating with the security forces and paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of trade unionists and local election candidates standing for the *Frente Social y Político* in Risaralda following a reported paramilitary death threat issued on 6 October;
- asking the authorities what measures, deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves, they are taking to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into this latest threat, that the results are made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Colombia to be included in these investigations;

- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with recommendations made by the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations.

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

Fax: + 57 1 342 0592 / 337 58 90

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

Governor of Risaralda Department

Sra. Elsa Gladys Cifuentes Aranzazu

Gobernación de Risaralda

Parque Olaya Herrera, Calle 19, No. 13-17

Pereira, Risaralda, COLOMBIA

Fax: + 57 63 358700

Salutation: Dear Governor / Sra. Gobernadora

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

Fax: + 57 1 566 4573

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los DH (CPDH)

A. A. 12817

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 27 November 2003.