

PUBLIC

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UA 274/98 Fear for safety / Possible extrajudicial execution

21 October 1998

COLOMBIA **Jorge Ortega García, trade union leader - killed**
Domingo Rafael Tovar Arrieta, and other National Trade Union
Leadership members, particularly those belonging to the Central Unitaria de
Trabajadores (CUT), Trade Union Congress

On 20 October 1998 Jorge Ortega García died outside his home after being shot in the head and chest repeatedly by an unknown gunman. There are serious concerns that other leaders of the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), Trade Union Congress, may be the target of similar attacks, particularly in the light of the on-going 15 day national strike coordinated by the CUT.

Jorge Ortega García's high-profile trade union work had made him the target of repeated threats and harassment over a number of years. On 22 September he and Domingo Rafael Tovar Arrieta, another CUT leader, reported receiving death threats from an unidentified individual who approached them in the street. On the same day, Jorge Ortega García's home was raided by a group of unidentified men who reportedly beat, drugged and bound his wife before searching the house. The police did not appear on the scene for 24 hours. The CUT was holding a two day strike at the time of the threats and illegal raid.

The CUT and other organizations have repeatedly called for the threats and harassment suffered by Jorge Ortega García and his family to be fully investigated, and for him and other CUT leaders to be given official protection. However, the authorities had reportedly not responded to these requests by the time Jorge Ortega García was killed.

Jorge Ortega García's name was reportedly on a death list (*lista negra*) used by paramilitary groups. His killing has heightened fears for the safety of all those named on the death list, which is known to include other prominent trade unionists, social activists and human rights defenders.

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 sympathizers or auxiliaries by the security and armed forces. Such accusations have frequently been followed by serious human rights violations, often perpetrated by the security forces' paramilitary allies.

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. The Colombian Government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989. Yet these groups continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

No effective steps have yet been taken by the authorities to control the actions of such groups and to hold their members accountable for the serious and widespread human rights violations they commit. Colombia's Attorney General recently stated that more than 200 arrest warrants issued against alleged paramilitary members in connection with human rights violations have still not been acted upon by the security forces.

Colombia's new President, Andrés Pastrana, took office on 8 August 1998. So far, he and his government have not taken any effective steps to tackle the country's long running human rights crisis.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing your concern at the killing of Jorge Ortega García on 20 October 1998;
- in the light of this killing and the death threats made against trade union leaders, expressing concern for the safety of trade union leaders and their families, particularly Domingo Rafael Tovar Arrieta and other CUT leaders;
- expressing concern for other trade unionists, social activists and human rights defenders whose names appear on a paramilitary death list (*lista negra*);
- urging the authorities to conduct a full and thorough investigation into this killing and threats made against trade union leaders, including the raid on Jorge Ortega García's house, during which his wife was beaten; that the results be made public and that those found responsible be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to take all steps deemed appropriate by those under threat to guarantee their safety;
- reminding Colombia's new government of the country's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

APPEALS TO:

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
Tx: 44281 PALP CO
Fax: + 57 1 284 2186/289 3377/286 7434/
Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA
Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes:45406 MINGO CO
Fax:+ 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405
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 2000 (when ansaphone picks up dial 2017 for fax)
Salutation: Estimado Dr./Dear Dr.

COPIES TO:

Trade Union:Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (CUT)
AA 221 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 8 december 1998.

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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