

23 October 2001

Further information on UA 230/01 (AMR 23/088/2001, 12 September 2001) and follow-up (AMR 23/101/2001) - Fear for safety

COLOMBIA	Members of the USO oil workers' union Other trade unionists Julian Cote (m) Fredys Rueda (m) Rafael Jaime (m)
Killed:	Servando Lerma (m), Arturo Escalante (m), Luis Lopez (m) and Luis Manual Anaya (m)

Two USO members have been murdered in Santander department, reportedly by paramilitaries, and USO leaders in the department have received written death threats from a paramilitary group which acts with the acquiescence of the Colombian army. The paramilitaries have reportedly announced that they are sending 300 combatants to reinforce the city of Barrancabermeja, and Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of trade unionists in the city and the surrounding area.

USO leaders in Casabe, municipality of Yondó, across the river from Barrancabermeja, reportedly received a written death threat on 18 October from the *Bloque Santander* (Santander Bloc) of the army-backed paramilitary organization *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia: "*Tomamos la decisión de declarar objetivo militar a la USO*", "We have taken the decision to declare the USO a military target". The USO called a one-day national stoppage to protest against the death threats and to draw attention to several reported killings of USO workers in recent weeks by paramilitaries.

USO leader Servando Lerma was killed in Barrancabermeja on 10 October. A USO member, Arturo Escalante Moro, was reportedly abducted by paramilitaries on 27 September in Tibú, Norte de Santander department. Amnesty International has received reports that he was killed on 16 October.

Members of another trade union, the *Sindicato de Conductores y Trabajadores de Transporte San Silvestre* (SINCOTRAINER), San Silvestre Union of Drivers and Transport Workers, have also come under attack. According to reports, the union's president, Luis López, was killed by paramilitaries on 19 October in Barrancabermeja. The union treasurer, Luis Manual Anaya, was killed, reportedly by paramilitaries, two days earlier.

Paramilitary forces recently held a press conference in Barrancabermeja where they reiterated their threats to kill trade union and other activists in the city. They have been able to build up a heavy presence in Barrancabermeja because the armed forces have failed to effectively confront paramilitary groups operating in the city and surrounding areas. As a result, despite repeated national and international condemnation, illegal paramilitary checkpoints have been able to operate unhindered in areas around the city in close proximity to the security forces, and paramilitaries maintain an open presence in the city, unchallenged despite the heavy military presence. During 2001 around 70 paramilitaries have been arrested by the security forces, but most were released without charge.

There is no further news of Julian Cote, Fredys Rueda or Rafael Jaime.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The security and armed forces and their paramilitary allies often accuse trade unionists of being guerrilla sympathizers or auxiliaries. The people they accuse are frequently harassed, tortured and killed, often by paramilitaries. During 2000, 112 trade union leaders and members were murdered. In December 2000,

a leading trade union leader, Wilson Borja Díaz, had to flee Colombia after he was shot and wounded by gunmen (see UA 387/00, 21 December 2000). Several active and retired police officers have been linked to the attack by judicial investigations. So far this year around 118 trade unionists have been killed and 66 "disappeared" the majority by army-backed paramilitary groups.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of USO and other trade union activists in Barrancabermeja and nationally following recent paramilitary killings and paramilitary death threats against the USO and other activists;
- asking the authorities what measures, deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves, they are going to take to guarantee the safety of those at risk;
- urging the authorities to order an independent, impartial and conclusive investigation into the threats and killings, with those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Barrancabermeja, 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 stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

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

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1566 2071

Salutation: Dear President Pastrana / Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente

Minister of the Interior

Dr. 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 1 562 5298/ 562 9890

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación, Apartado Aéreo
29855, Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Satafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2000

Salutation: Dear Dr. / Estimado Dr.

Governor of Santander

Sr. Jorge Eliecer Gómez Villamizar

Gobernador del Departamento de Santander, Gobernación de Santander, Calle 37,
No. 10-30, Bucaramanga, Santander, COLOMBIA

Fax: +57 76 339889

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Gobernador

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

CREDHOS

A.A 505

Barrancabermeja, Santander
Colombia

Trade Union Confederation
CUT Nacional
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 4 December 2001.