

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/067/2001

UA 170/01

Fear for

**COLOMBIAHernando HERNÁNDEZ PARDO -Vice-President of the CUT & President of
the USO
Other members of the USO trade union**

Trade union leader Hernando Hernández reportedly narrowly escaped an assassination attempt on 6 July. Amnesty International is now very concerned for his safety, and that of other USO members.

Hernando Hernández is the President of the *Unión Sindical Obrera* (USO), Oil Workers' Trade Union. He was speaking at a union meeting in the oil-refining city of Barrancabermeja, in Santander department, when he was warned that a group of heavily armed paramilitary gunmen had come to the meeting to kill him. The meeting was immediately suspended and Hernando Hernández was taken to safety.

There is a strong security force presence in this heavily militarized area, but paramilitary forces have apparently been able to operate unhindered. The security forces in Barrancabermeja city have repeatedly failed to take effective action to confront the paramilitaries.

The security forces and their paramilitary allies have often labelled USO members as guerrilla collaborators or sympathizers. In the past those labelled as such have been frequently harassed, tortured and killed.

Last year a paramilitary death list circulated in the region. The list included the names of trade unionists belonging to the *Unión Sindical Obrera* (USO), the oil workers' union, as well as human rights defenders working in the region including members of the *Corporación Regional de Derechos Humanos* (CREDHOS), Regional Human Rights Corporation, and the *Organización Feminina Popular* (OFP), Popular Women's Organization (see UA 163/00, 16 June 2000, AMR 23/047/2001).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Trade unionists in Colombia have faced systematic persecution for years. At least 112 trade unionists were killed in 2000, and more than 45 have died so far this year, mainly at the hands of army-backed paramilitaries.

In December 2000, a prominent 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. On 15 February, 25 unionists affiliated to the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Trade Union Confederation, occupied the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in protest at the threats, harassment and persecution that trade unionists continue to face. Hernando Hernández is the CUT vice-president.

During the 1998 national strike, seven trade union leaders, including previous CUT Vice-president Jorge Ortega Garcia, were shot dead (see UA 274/98, AMR 23/80/98, 21 October 1998, and follow up, AMR 23/90/98, 24 November 1998). Those responsible have not been brought to justice.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of CUT Vice-President and USO President, Hernando Hernández Pardo, and for that of other USO members;

- asking the authorities what measures they are going to take to guarantee the safety of Hernando Hernández Pardo and other trade unionists at risk;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Barrancabermeja and the surrounding area, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities 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 the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Minister of the Interior

Señor 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 1 341 9583 / 334 3960

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Diagonal 22B 5201, Apartado Aéreo 29855, Santafé de Bogotá
COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2022 (If the call is answered, say "Fax, por favor" and wait for the signal.)

Salutation: Estimado Dr. / Dear Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:

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 21 August 2001.