



August 23, 2013

President

Juan Manuel Santos, President of Colombia
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Bogotá, Colombia
Fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 & Mail

Rafael Pardo Rueda Minister of Labor
Calle 14 No. 99-33
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear President Santos and Minister Pardo:

Re: Colombia - Paramilitaries threaten trade unionists and human rights defenders

I am writing on behalf of the 250,000 members of UFCW Canada, the leading and most progressive union in Canada, and the Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, a committee of lawyers dedicated to promoting the rule of law and human rights internationally, to express our concern for the safety of human rights defenders José Humberto Torres, Iván Cepeda and José Alvear Restrepo Lawyer's Collective ([Corporación Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo](#), CCAJAR). CCAJAR is recognized internationally for their work defending human rights before domestic courts and within the Inter-American human rights system.

On August 4th, the paramilitary group Rastrojo - Urban Commandos (Los Rastrojos - Comandos Urbanos) emailed an announcement containing death threats. The communication named 30 people, most of them trade unionists, and a few organizations, stating that they were military targets and accused them of having links to guerrilla forces. They also threatened these people's families.

Among those named are the Union of Workers of the Mining, Petrochemical, Agro-Fuels and Energy Industries (Sindicato Nacional de la Industria Minera, Petroquímica, Agrocombustible y Energética, SINTRAMIENERGETICA), the United Federation of Mining and Energy Workers (Federación Unitaria de Trabajadores Mineros y Energéticos, FUNTRAENERGETICA), the Union of Workers of the Metal Industry (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria del Metal, SINTRAIME), human rights defenders José Humberto Torres and Iván Cepeda and CCAJAR.

Several of the people named are members of SINTRAMIENERGETICA and part of a union delegation negotiating with the mining company Drummond Ltd. They have been on strike for over two weeks, following failed negotiations. In recent months paramilitaries have made repeated death threats against members and leaders of SINTRAMIENERGETICA. Small-scale miners (mineros artesanales) had also begun a national mining strike in mid-July, which was supported by the trade unions named in the death threat.

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As you are certainly aware, Colombia has one of the highest rates of trade unionist homicides in the world. Trade unionists are consistently threatened and murdered during labour disputes and campaigns to improve pay and working conditions. Many have been extra judicially executed or subjected to enforced disappearance.

We call upon your government to provide protection for those who have been threatened and to order a full and impartial investigation into the death threats. The results of this investigation should be published and those responsible brought to justice.

We urge you to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

Your immediate intervention will not only save the lives of those being threatened but will also show the world that your government truly respects and upholds human rights.

Sincerely,



Naveen Mehta
Monitor for Attacks on Labour Advocates - LRWC
General Counsel & Director of Human Rights, Equity, and Diversity - UFCW Canada

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Copied to:

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