



WORRYING INCREASE IN ASSASSINATIONS AGAINST UNIONIZED WORKERS IN COLOMBIA

Interim report: January 1 – March 31, 2008

Escuela Nacional Sindical –ENS

During the first trimester of 2008, 17 workers affiliated to unions have been assassinated, which represents a substantial 89% increase when compared to the 9 assassinations perpetrated during the same period in 2007. This implies that, if the institutions charged with guaranteeing the life of Colombian unionists do not take effective actions that attack the root causes of this anti-union violence, the number of homicides this year could double in comparison with the number perpetrated in 2007.

Even so, it is necessary to state that the worsening of the situation is not just related to the global number of assassinations, but is also characterized by factors such as:

1. The 800% growth in comparison to the first trimester of 2007 of assassinations committed against union leaders in Colombia.

Type of unionist	Cases 2007	Cases 2008
Union leader	1	9
Rank and file unionist	8	8
Total	9	17

Source: SINDERH –ENS database

2. The large number of affected unions – during this trimester, 13 unions have been affected by the assassination of their leaders and affiliates.

In the same way, it is important to highlight that both the CUT and the CGT have been victims of assassinations against their members during this period, with 13 and 3 violations, respectively, as well as unions unaffiliated to any confederation, which suffered one assassination this trimester.

UNION	HOMICIDES
ADIDA	2
ADUCESAR	1
ANTHOC	2
ASEDAR	1
ASEINPEC	1
ASINORT	1
ASMEDAS	1
ASOINCA	1
FENSUAGRO	3
SIGGINPEC	1
SINTRACARBON	1
SINTRAMBIENTE	1
UNEB	1
TOTAL	17

Source: SINDERH –ENS database

3. In 82.4% of the cases, or 14 of the 17 assassinations, there is no clarity on the identity of the presumed author of the crime, which creates obstacles to revealing the truth, bringing the case to justice, and providing integral reparations for the victims.

The difficulty in establishing the presumed author of the crime, is due to deliberate actions by the victimizers in order to obscure the true motives of the violations presented as common crimes (street assaults, crimes of passion, etc.) due to the gradual replacement of guns by knives as the assault weapon, in order to create a more domestic profile of the crime committed. Examples of this strategy can be seen in the cases of the members of ADIDA Arley Benavides Samboni¹ and Gildardo Antonio Gómez Alzate², as well as the assassinated union leader Adolfo González Montes of SINTRACARBON³

¹ Ex public health worker at the former Health Department of Cauca (currently liquidated) who was part of the city branch of ANTHOC Balboa, where he was Culture and Education Secretary, he was brutally assassinated with a knife on February 9 of this year.

² Teacher and delegate of the Association of Antioquian Teachers ADIDA, and member of the Center of Studies and Research on Teaching CEID, who was assassinated on Saturday March 7 at night with a knife.

³ This case occurred in a situation of previous threats against the SINTRACARBON union, during preparations for their collective bargaining negotiations. The facts show that he was tortured and brutally assassinated in his home in the city of Riohacha, by persons who entered into his residence on March 22 of the current year. Currently, some leaders of this union organization have been repeatedly threatened via telephone and harassed by

The only three cases where indicators exist showing hints of who the presumed authors are, indicate that the national Army of Colombia is responsible, in relation to assassinations of small farmers affiliated to the FENSUAGRO union.

4. There has been an abrupt increase of 52.9% in the number of assassinations committed during March in relation to the two previous months. This situation should be quickly and thoroughly investigated, as all of the assassinated unionists during this period have in common, apart from their affiliation to a union, is their participation in the national march against paramilitarism and all forms of violence and for the rights of all victims of socio-political violence, which took place on March 6 of this year in diverse regions of the country.

5. 10 of the 17 assassinations that have occurred during 2008 have occurred in the southwest region of the country, which also registered an increase in the number of human rights violations against unionists during 2007.

STATE	HOMICIDES
ANTIOQUIA	4
PUTUMAYO	2
CAUCA	2
VALLE	1
TOLIMA	1
GUAJIRA	1
CESAR	1
META	1
NORTE DE SANTANDER	1
CAQUETÁ	1
ARAUCA	1
CUNDINAMARCA	1
TOTAL	17

Source: SINDERH –ENS database

6. We draw attention to the assassination of female unionists – two during the current year⁴ – as well as a unionist who belongs to an ethnic minority group,⁵

strange persons stalking the streets where their houses are located, and others appear on the lists published by illegal armed groups. Coincidentally, these violations have occurred and intensified when the union is conducting collective bargaining negotiations.

⁴ CARMEN CECILIA CARVAJAL RAMIREZ, member of ASINORT, and MARIA DEL CARMEN MESA PASACHOA affiliated to ASEDAR



which although is not atypical in comparison to previous years, does show the persistence of these kinds of crimes.

7. This increase in homicides during the first trimester of the year is so worrying, that the government is making an attempt to communicate its version of the facts to public opinion. We have seen reports where the government classifies the motives of these homicides, without recurring to an investigation and without a judicial sentence proclaimed, to motives such as personal problems and robberies, among others.

With these actions, the government usurps the role of the Attorney General's office as well as of the judges, looking to sidetrack the attention and concern about the violence that is committed against the Colombian union movement.

For this reason, we expect and demand from the government, seriousness, responsibility, and respect for the dignity of the victims. Instead of dedicating its efforts to debunk the anti-union character of the violence that is exercised against unionized workers, it should dedicate itself to supporting in a more consistent way the units of prosecutors and judges, so that the union movement and the Colombian society in general can have access to the truth, justice, and reparation as a necessary condition for the no-repetition of these crimes.

8. Due largely for its desire to achieve the approval of the free trade agreement with the United States and less related to its desire to guarantee the realization of union freedoms, the national government recently announced the implementation of a rewards program for those who offer information on the presumed authors of assassinations of unionists.

The large increase in the number of unionists in this first trimester, the rewards program, and the protection program for unionists, are proof of the graves risks that Colombian unionists are subject to. These risks are due to structural factors which have not been addressed, which means that we are still very far from the moment in which the realization of union freedoms in Colombia is as risk-free as the realization of freedoms for business owners.

⁵ The union leader of ASOINCA, José Giraldo Damián, was assassinated in Cauca on February 9, 2008 with two bullet impacts at 9:30 AM in La Sierra. He was an indigenous person who lived in the Juanchito village, which is part of the Guachicono Reservation.

Annex

ASSASSINATED UNIONISTS – FIRST TRIMESTER 2008

Name	Date	Municipality	State	Abbreviation of the name of the union
ZULUAGA MARIO	01/02/08	MEDELLIN	ANTIOQUIA	ASMEDAS
PÉREZ ZAPATA RAMIRO DE JESÚS	01/12/08	SAN JERONIMO SAN	ANTIOQUIA	ADIDA
GONZÁLES ISRAEL SUÁREZ LEAL JOSÉ	01/24/08	ANTONIO	TOLIMA	FENSUAGRO
YEBRAIL DUARTE ACERO JOSE MARTIN	01/28/08	BELLO LA	ANTIOQUIA	SIGGINPEC
MESA PASACHOA MARIA DEL CARMEN	02/02/08	MACARENA	META	SINTRAMBIENTE
BENAVIDEZ SAMBONI ARLEY	02/08/08	TAME	ARAUCA	ASEDAR
MAMIÁN JOSÉ GIRALDO	02/09/08	BALBOA	CAUCA	ANTHOC
CARVAJAL RAMÍREZ CARMEN CECILIA	02/09/08	LA VEGA	CAUCA	ASOINCA
GOMEZ ALZATE GILDARDO ANTONIO	03/04/08	OCANA	NORTE DE SANTANDER	ASINORT
GÓMEZ ROZO LEONIDAS	03/07/08	MEDELLIN	ANTIOQUIA	ADIDA
MUÑOZ VÍCTOR MANUEL	03/08/08	BOGOTA AGUSTIN	BOGOTA D.E.	UNEB
BURBANO CARLOS JIMÉNEZ MANUEL ANTONIO	03/12/08	CODAZZI SAN VICENTE DEL CAGUÁN	CESAR	ADUCESAR
QUIROZ JOSE FERNANDO	03/12/08	ASIS	CAQUETÁ	ANTHOC
ASTROS AMAYA JOSÉ GREGORIO	03/15/08	ASIS	PUTUMAYO	FENSUAGRO
GONZÁLEZ MONTES ADOLFO	03/16/08	ASIS	PUTUMAYO	FENSUAGRO
	03/18/08	CARTAGO	VALLE	ASEINPEC
	03/22/08	RIOHACHA	GUAJIRA	SINTRACARBON

Source: SINDERH –ENS database