

government has done little to stop political violence. To the contrary, the government presence has been characterized by human rights groups as "disorganized... instead of fomenting confidence and security (the army) contributes to terror and social chaos in the region."

A new effort to stop violence begun in 1995 was put in jeopardy by renewed slayings in April and May.⁴³ Among those killed was Francisco Giraldo, head of the SINTRAINAGRO local in Apartadó. Subsequently, the CUT reported that it had information indicating that there was a list of other targeted trade unionists scheduled to be killed.⁴⁴ 313

Impunity

The impunity enjoyed by those who murder trade unionists is almost total. Of the 1,800 political killings of trade unionists reported by the CUT since 1986, few if any have been thoroughly investigated and prosecuted.⁴⁵

"Colombia is the only country where so many trade unionists can be killed and nothing happens," one government official told us.⁴⁶

When the ENS, with the help of a regional office of the government's Defensoria del Pueblo, requested from the government a review of 300 outstanding cases of trade unionists killed for political reasons since 1991, they received a response on only four cases. However, information on even these cases was restricted to the case name and number, with no details on any investigation.⁴⁷

⁴³ "Urabá pide apoyo a su pacto político," *Cambio* 16, March 1995, pp. 16-23.

⁴⁴ "Asesinado sindicalista," *El Espectador*, March 23, 1995.

⁴⁵ HRW/Americas interview, CUT, 1995; and CUT, "La guerra sucia," September 27, 1994.

⁴⁶ HRW/Americas interview, Defensoría del Pueblo-Medellín, April 18, 1995.

⁴⁷ HRW/Americas interview, Jorge Giraldo, ENS, April 18, 1995.

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The only exception we are aware of is the murder of USO treasurer Manuel Gustavo Chacón, killed in the Middle Magdalena region by a former sailor in 1988.⁴⁸ A network organized by Colonel Rodrigo Quiñonez, then navy intelligence director, was later determined to be responsible for forty-two political killings between 1991-1992, possibly including that of Chacón, according to information gathered by the CUT and a 1994 investigation by the government's Procuraduría Office of Special Investigations.⁴⁹

However, civilian courts lost their bid to prosecute the men in September 1994, and it seems that impunity will probably be the result of any military court investigation. An initial investigation by a military judge resulted in arrest warrants being issued for the sailors who reported the existence of the network, not the men accused of ordering political killings.⁵⁰ Subsequently, the Attorney General's office also issued warrants for the sailors.⁵¹

Hundreds of specific recommendations to improve human rights protections made by national and international human rights organizations over the past several years have been ignored; to the contrary, the government has supported key provisions, like the use of military tribunals to judge those accused of human rights violations, that strengthen impunity. According to the U.S. State Department, in 1994, "the (Colombian) Government continued to allow the military to assert jurisdiction over, and in almost all cases to fail to prosecute, abuses by military personnel."⁵²

"The misunderstood concept of 'team spirit' (within the military) has led to cover-ups and impedes investigation, puts obstacles at

⁴⁸ The man was convicted and sentenced to twenty two years imprisonment. Letter to HRW/Americas from Luis Eduardo Garzón, CUT, June 9, 1995; and "USO pide garantías para testigos contra la Armada," *El Espectador*, January 6, 1992.

⁴⁹ Letter to HRW/Americas from Luis Eduardo Garzón, CUT, June 9, 1995; and "Piden formal investigación contra inteligencia de la Armada," *El Tiempo*, October 8, 1994.

⁵⁰ "A la justicia Penal Militar, proceso por crímenes en Barrancabermeja," *El Espectador*, September 22, 1994.

⁵¹ "47 personas asesinadas resurgen del pasado de Barrancabermeja," *El Espectador*, February 24, 1995.

⁵² State Department, *Country Reports*, p. 350.