

## Wave of Violence in Colombia takes Heavy Toll on Indian Leaders

The Indigenous communities of Colombia have not escaped the alarming levels of violence registered in this country in the last few years. Many Indigenous communities have suffered the aftermath of a lingering and irrelevant war between the army and guerrilla groups; others, have been victims of the unrelenting struggle for land rights. The security forces generally see Indigenous people as potential guerrilla collaborators, and have directed arbitrary detentions, tortures, disappearances and murders against them. In addition to preexisting land struggles, Indigenous efforts to exercise rights under the new constitution, especially administration of government funds, have drawn violent opposition from traditional power groups. This year several cases have been added to the already long list of crimes against the Indigenous population of Colombia.

### Senu Activists Killed in Land Struggle

Three Senu Indigenous activists, Clemente Mendoza, Hernando Solano and Fernando Alvarez Conde, were murdered during the months of February and March in Northern Colombia in the community of Aserradero, Municipality of Purisima, Department of Cordoba. According to local reports, they were engaged in attempts to recover lands of the Gran Resguardo de San Andres de Sotavento through a land title given by the Spanish crown three centuries ago.

### ONIC Leaders Assassinated for Demanding Compliance with the Constitution

On March 26, four Senu Indigenous leaders were murdered on the outskirts of the municipality of San Andres de Sotavento. The four were intercepted at 12 o'clock in the night, by unknown assailants while riding in a van belonging to the community. The empty burned van was discovered with blood stains inside. The next day, the lifeless bodies of Porfirio Ayala Mendoza, Alternate Secretary of the ONIC, nominated for 1993-1997 during last September's National Indigenous Congress; Hector Aquiles Malo, Chief of the Gran Resguardo de San Andres de Sotavento; Luis Arthur Lucas, Senu leader, and ex-General Secretary of the ONIC from 1968 to 1990; and Cesar Mendoza Cruz the vehicle's driver. Indian groups see these murders as manifestations of traditional power groups opposition to Indigenous communities' attempts to exercise new constitutional rights to manage tax revenue and investment for their regions.

### Assassination in Southern Colombia

Amnesty International reports that, the body of well-known Indigenous leader Laureano Ñampue was found in the San Juan River on May 6, near his home in the Guachucal Indigenous reserve in the department of Nariño. According to witnesses, he was violently removed from his home by heavily armed men in military uniform. His captors claimed they were detaining him for interrogation by the local battalion's commander. Family members were unable to obtain any information regarding his whereabouts from local authorities. He was found dead a day later. Ñampue had been threatened previously because of his work to recover Indigenous lands.



### "Tireless" Activist Killed in Tolima

On May 15, ONIC denounced that Yesid Bocanegra Martinez was shot to death by gunmen in the town of Colaima, department of Tolima. Omar Mendoza vice-president of Tolima's Indigenous council also received three gunshot wounds in the attack, and remains hospitalized. Bocanegra was described by ONIC as a "tireless fighter for our cause".

Indigenous communities throughout the country are now on alert fearing that a second major wave of violence will follow attempts by Indigenous communities to exercise their new constitutional rights. (See "After the Constitution" in this issue) 🐦

*Information supplied by National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC).*

Please send letters urging the Colombian government to provide adequate protection to Indigenous leaders exercising their constitutional rights, that these killings be immediately investigated and that those responsible be held accountable to:

*Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo, Presidente de la Republica, Palacio de Nariño, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia.  
Fax: 011 57 1 286 7434/287 7939.*

With copies to:  
*Ambassador Gabriel Silva, Embassy of Colombia, 2118 Leroy Pl. NW, Washington, DC, 20008. and: ONIC, AA 32395, Bogotá, Colombia.*