

## COLOMBIA: Oil Workers End Hunger Strike

RRN letters 05/23/03, 08/27/03, 11/12/05      UA 136/03, UA 246/03, CSN cases; Colombia, USO workers

**Dozens of trade unionists are killed each year in Colombia.** RRN members have written letters on behalf of USO (Sindical Obrera de la Industria Del Petroleo, the oil workers' union), **whose members are routinely threatened and assassinated, particularly in Barrancabermeja, the main oil-producing city.** Human rights abuses against USO members have escalated since paramilitaries murdered Aury Sara Marrugo, USO president, in December 2001. Former USO leader Marco Tulio Díaz was shot and killed in July 2003. In August 2003 paramilitaries named four USO members as next on the list for execution.

RRN members wrote to Colombian officials in concern for the health of five oil workers union members who went on a hunger strike October 20, 2005 (Rodolfo Vecino, Hernando Meneses, Rafael Cabarcas, Édgar Mojica, and Jorge Ortega). **The Uribe administration is moving toward privatizing ECOPEPETROL, despite a May 2004 agreement between the government and the union to maintain the oil company as a state-owned company.** The Uribe government has plans to sell 51% of Colombia's second largest oil refinery.

### Hunger strike ends

The USO workers ended their 12-day hunger strike union (USO) on November 3, 2005 after winning assurances from the archbishop of Cartagena and the governor of Bolívar state that they would present a public proposition to the national government to prohibit privatization of ECOPEPETROL's oil refinery in Cartagena. Archbishop Jorge Enrique Giménez and Gov. Libardo Simancas committed to present the plan within 30 days.