



# EMBASSY of COLOMBIA

W A S H I N G T O N

## PROTECTING UNION MEMBERS

Colombia has become a much safer place for labor union members due to the significant decrease in overall violence continued government efforts to provide specialized protection for union members.

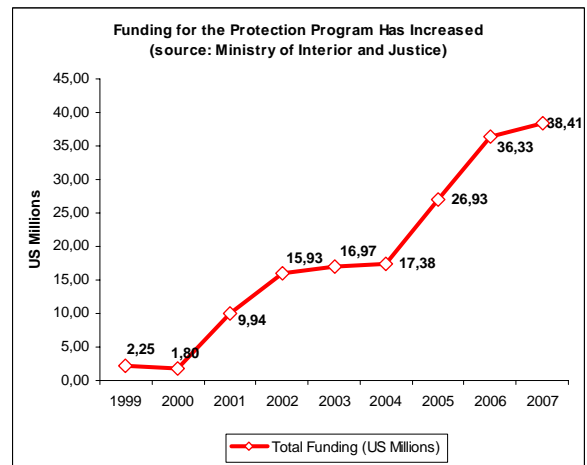
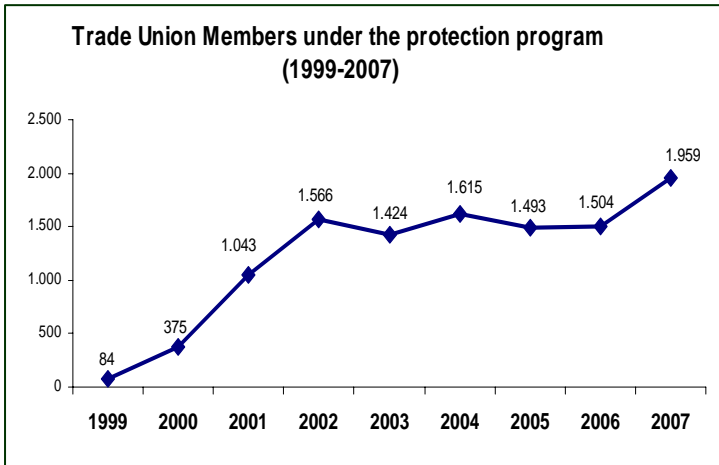
The union protection program launched in the late 1990s is cooperative effort of various Colombian law enforcement agencies and provides protection for labor union members, families and other vulnerable groups such as politicians, journalists and other civil leaders.

*"We are thankful to the [Government personnel], who have been providing the security service to our threatened members throughout the country"*

William Millan Monsalve  
Joint General Secretary, General Workers Confederation

and  
a  
their

Since the program started, the number of trade union members covered annually increased from 84 to more than 1,900. Union members are one of the largest single groups covered under the program. The total budget of the program has grown by some 300 percent since 2002, to almost U\$42 million for 2008.



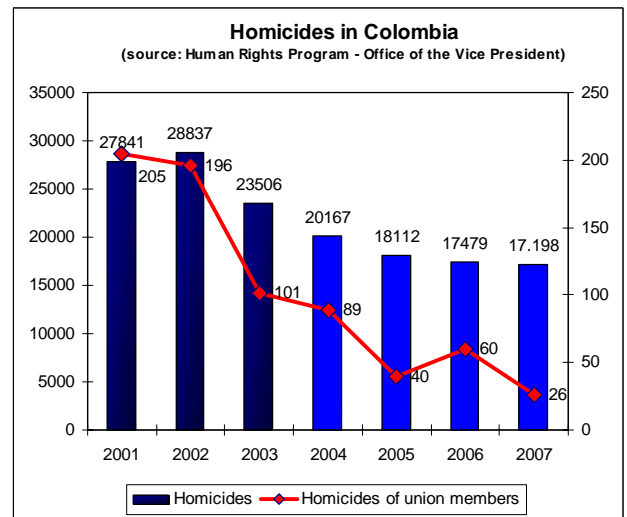
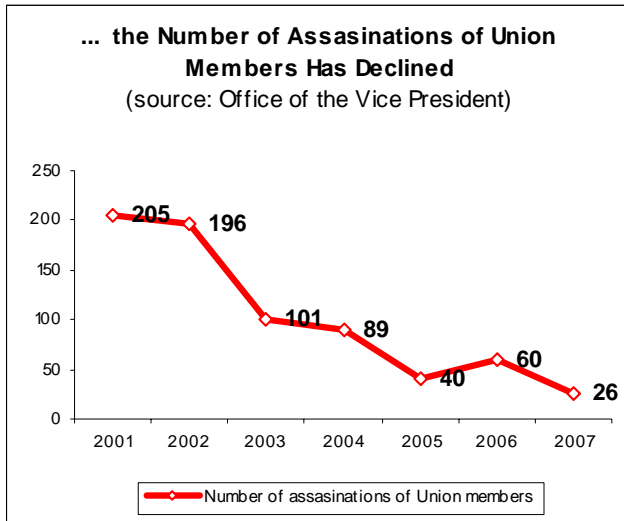
In addition to those trade union members enrolled in the protection program, the government has relocated for their safety some 1,246 teachers since 2002 – whether affiliated to unions or not – who have faced threats.

The increased use of the protection program over time demonstrates the confidence of trade union members in the integrity of the government's effort has risen. Since 2002, not a single trade union member enrolled in the program has been killed.

This success also reflects the determined efforts of the government in its on-going campaign to better establish the authority of the state and reduce violence in Colombia – whether committed by paramilitaries, FARC, ELN, other criminal groups, or by rogue military or police authorities.



The result of this sustained effort by the government is showing up in the data. From a high of almost 200 murders of union members in 2002, the total number fell in 2007 to 26 – still 26 murders are too many, but a reduction of 87 percent since 2002. This represents an even greater reduction than the overall decline in the number of Colombia's murders during this period of some 40 percent, from almost 29,000 to just over 17,000.



### The Case of Wilson Borja:

During his tenure as president of FENALTRASE (the union of all government workers), Borja was the target of an assassination attempt on December 15, 2000. His life was saved thanks to the quick and effective reaction of his two bodyguards, both of whom were seriously wounded during the attack. Today, Wilson Borja is a member of Congress in the House of Representatives. The Congressman is one of the most vocal opposition members to the sitting Colombian government. He is still protected by 14 bodyguards.