

PUBLIC

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31 October 2007

UA 282/07 Fear for safety/Death threats

COLOMBIA **Oscar Maussa, (m) leader of the Blanquicet Farm Workers' Cooperative
(Cooperativa de Trabajadores Agropecuarios de Blanquicet, COOTRAGROBLAN)
Other members of COOTRAGROBLAN**

Paramilitaries in the north-western department of Antioquia have threatened to kill farm workers' leader Oscar Maussa. He has reportedly fled the area, but he and other members of the workers' cooperative are thought to be in grave danger.

Oscar Maussa is one of the leaders of the Blanquicet Farm Worker's Cooperative (*Cooperativa de Trabajadores Agropecuarios de Blanquicet*, COOTRAGROBLAN), which was set up by workers from La Esperanza farm to work towards an improvement of their livelihoods. The members of this Cooperative were forced to flee the farm after paramilitaries occupied it in 1996. As a COOTRAGROBLAN representative, Oscar Maussa sought help from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in March 2007. In 2006 the IACHR urged the government to protect him and his family, as well as three other families that are part of COOTRAGROBLAN. Oscar Maussa has also submitted complaints of paramilitary activity to the authorities.

On 6 October in the Blanquicet area of Turbo Municipality, Antioquia Department, a man told a COOTRAGROBLAN member that the leader of the paramilitary group operating in the area was looking for Oscar Maussa, so as to kill him. Army-backed paramilitaries in the area are reportedly operating under the name *Águilas Negras* (Black Eagles).

On 5 October six gunmen in military uniforms, who said they were paramilitaries, took up positions next to the La Esperanza Farm in Blanquicet. They searched vehicles leaving the farm and asked the drivers to take them to various other places along the road. There is a heavy military presence in the region, but paramilitaries are still able to operate freely.

In June 2005 the Colombian judicial authorities issued a resolution calling for the La Esperanza farm to be returned to its rightful owners, the members of COOTRAGROBLAN. COOTRAGROBLAN members started to return in June 2007 despite reports that paramilitaries were still in the area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since 1985 more than three million people have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the violent actions of all parties to the conflict, during Colombia's long-running internal conflict. All parties to the conflict have been responsible for the forcible displacement of civilians. Over 60 per cent of those displaced have been evicted from lands situated in areas of mineral, agricultural or other economic interest. Army-backed paramilitaries are thought to have occupied several million hectares of lands through violent action. Over the last year people who have been forced off their land have been threatened or killed when they have sought to reclaim lands from paramilitaries.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Oscar Maussa, who was reportedly threatened with death on 6 October, and the other members of COOTRAGROBLAN Farm Workers' Cooperative;

- calling on the authorities to order full and impartial investigations into the threat, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to take all measures necessary to guarantee the safety of the members of COOTRAGROBLAN Farm Workers' Cooperative, as deemed appropriate by the community themselves, and to guarantee them a safe return to their property, La Esperanza farm;
- calling on the authorities to take decisive action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the region and to break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

Vice-president of the Republic

Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón

Vicepresidencia, Carrera 8A No 7-27, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 565 7682

Salutation: Dear Vice-president Santos/Estimado Sr. Vice-presidente Santos

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 337 5890 / 342 0592

Salutation: Dear President Uribe/ Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B (Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C, Piso 4

Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Fiscal/Dear Mr Iguarán

COPIES TO:

Non- governmental human rights organization

Justicia y Paz Intereclesial

Calle 62, No. 17-26 (Chapinero)

Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 December 2007.