

UA 03/99 Fear for safety

8 January 1999

**COLOMBIA Displaced communities living in Bocas del Atrato and Bahía Cupica
(department of Chocó) and Turbo (department of Antioquia)**

There is serious concern for the safety of displaced communities living in the above-named areas in the north-western region of Urabá and Chocó. Local security forces and their paramilitary allies are reportedly orchestrating a campaign of intimidation against them, raising fears that a paramilitary attack is imminent.

On 16 December 1998, in the presence of local authorities and apparently also paramilitary members, a local army official reportedly accused four leaders of the displaced community in Turbo of being guerrilla leaders. He also accused other members of the community of acting as guerrilla auxiliaries, saying: "*Eso le debemos parar, hay que golpear*" (We have got to stop this, we have to hit them).

Since 30 December 1998, armed members of a paramilitary force have reportedly entered the displaced communities' camp in Turbo several times on unmarked motorbikes and communicating via walkie-talkies. One of the paramilitaries reportedly told people in the community that: "*Ustedes están buenos para quemarlos*" (You lot are ready to be killed). Police officers witnessed these events but took no action.

On 1 January a leader of the displaced community reportedly received two telephone death threats accusing her of guerilla involvement.

A Colombian army unit also established itself in the displaced community in Bahía Cupica, department of Chocó, on 1 January 1999. Army officials reportedly stated that the community is collaborating with guerrilla groups in the area. In the past communities accused of collaborating with the armed opposition have subsequently suffered serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" by the Colombian armed forces and their paramilitary auxiliaries.

On 3 January 1999 an armed man -- reportedly an off-duty policeman -- approached a group of displaced people and accused one of them of being a guerrilla member.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The displaced communities in Bocas del Atrato, Bahía Cupica and Turbo were forced to flee their homes in the municipality of Riosucio, department of Chocó, in 1997, after intense fighting between armed opposition groups and the army and its paramilitary allies. In September 1998 José Osorio Montoya, a leader of the displaced community in Turbo, was reportedly killed by paramilitary forces (See UA 246/98, AMR 23/71/98, 17 September 1998).

The increasing threat of paramilitary attacks against the displaced communities is apparently in response to reports that armed opposition groups are moving back into the region.

Over the last two years tens of thousands of peasant farmers have been forced to flee their homes in Antioquia and Chocó as a result of paramilitary offensives undertaken in coordination with the security forces.

Reports confirm that, in spite of repeated denunciations to the authorities by local people, paramilitary forces continue to operate with total freedom in the region and act openly in the presence of civil, police and military authorities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the displaced communities in Bahía Cupica and Bocas del Atrato, Chocó department, and Turbo, Antioquia department;
- expressing particular concern that the leaders of these communities could face imminent attack from paramilitary forces operating in the region;
- calling on the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by the communities themselves to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into threats made against the communities and their leaders, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the civilian, police and military authorities and paramilitary forces operating in the region;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments;
- reminding the government of Colombia of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia, Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes: 44281 PALP CO
Faxes: + 57 1 284 2186/289 3377/286 7434/
Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of Defence, Dr. Rodrigo Lloreda, Ministro de Defensa Nacional, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO
Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of the Interior, Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes:45406 MINGO CO
Fax:+ 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405 / 286 0053 / 341 9739

COPIES TO: Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace
 Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz, AA 31861, Santafé de 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 18 February 1999.

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Article

3, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

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