

PUBLIC

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Fear for

COLOMBIA Civilian population of the Catatumbo region, including Luis Alberto Cano (m), aged 18

Killed: Marco Aurelio Jaimes (m)
Rodolfo Forero (m)
Daniel Robles (m) aged 39

In late December 2001, several paramilitary incursions took place in the Catatumbo region. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the civilian population there and for the safety of Luis Alberto Cano, who was taken hostage and reportedly tortured by paramilitaries.

Paramilitary gunmen reportedly raided the hamlet of Marquetalia, Tibú Municipality, Catatumbo region, Norte de Santander Department on 22 December 2001, killing 14 people including Marco Aurelio Jaimes and Rodolfo Forero. From 26 to 30 December 2001, paramilitary groups travelling on the Catatumbo River reportedly captured some 20 people living in the area, including children. The hostages were then used as human shields during five days of fighting with guerrilla groups.

On 28 December 2001, paramilitary gunmen reportedly entered the hamlet of La Paz, Filo Gringo community, also in Catatumbo during day-long fighting with guerrillas. According to witnesses, the paramilitaries accused Daniel Robles of being a guerrilla collaborator, tortured him, cut off an ear and then beheaded him. Another member of the community, Luis Alberto Cano, was also reportedly tortured by being slashed in the face and remains a paramilitary hostage. Many inhabitants of La Paz have reportedly been forcibly displaced, abandoning their homes to flee into the jungle or towards Cúcuta to avoid fighting between the paramilitary and guerrilla groups.

The paramilitary groups have reportedly announced that they will carry out further massacres in El Tarra municipality, Norte de Santander. Fear that the paramilitaries will implement their threats has reportedly caused thousands of families to flee their homes since the beginning of the year.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Paramilitary groups launched a large-scale incursion into the Catatumbo region in 1999 with the backing of the security forces. Since then many civilians have been killed or "disappeared". In February 2001 an army-backed paramilitary group entered two other communities in El Tarra, El Martillo and Plaza Cotiza. Most of the population had already fled, but four who remained were reportedly abducted, tortured and killed (see UA 39/01, AMR 23/018/01, 12 February 2001 and follow up AMR 23/026/2001, 28 February 2001).

Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have repeatedly denounced the continued paramilitary activity and serious human rights violations that are taking place in El Tarra and the Catatumbo region. These attacks take place despite a heavy military presence in the region, and illustrate the authorities' continued failure to combat paramilitarism and protect civilians. The attacks continue despite repeated recommendations from the UN that the authorities take action against paramilitary groups and government promises to do so.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian population in El Tarra, and Tibú, Norte de Santander Department, and the rest of the Catatumbo region after the paramilitary incursions of 22 and 28 December 2001;
- asking what the government and armed forces will do to protect the civilian population;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the massacre of 14 people including Marco Aurelio Jaimes and Rodolfo Forero in the Tibú municipality and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the reported torture and killing of Daniel Robles and the torture of Luis Alberto Cano of La Paz hamlet, Catatumbo and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of the population near the Catatumbo River who were reportedly abducted by paramilitaries and used as hostages between 26 and 30 December 2001, calling for a full and impartial investigation and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern that the government and armed forces have failed to protect the civilian population of the department of Norte de Santander and the Catatumbo region and to combat paramilitary groups in the area, despite repeated warnings of impending paramilitary attacks;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups in the department of Norte de Santander, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Apartado Aéreo 29855, Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite),
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Fiscal General, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2000

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

National Advocate for the People

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,
Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,
Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301,
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegram: National Advocate, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 640 0491

Salutation: Dear Mr. Cifuentes Muñoz / Estimado Sr. Cifuentes Muñoz

Commander of the V Brigade

General Martín Orlando Carreño Sandoval,
Comandante de la V Brigada
Calle 14, Carrera 33, Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Telegram: Comandante de la V Brigada, Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Fax: +57 76 455051 / 351493 / 359189 / 334390

Salutation: Dear Commander Carreño Sandoval / Sr. General Carreño Sandoval

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

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 566 20 71

Salutation: Dear President Pastrana / Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente Pastrana

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

MINGA

AA 40303,

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 15 February 2002.