

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/004/2006

06 February 2006

Further Information on UA 85/05 (AMR 23/009/2005, 13 April 2005) - Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA Afro-descendent inhabitants in the Cacarica River Basin, Riosucio Municipality, department of Chocó

According to recent reports, army-backed paramilitaries are planning an imminent attack against the inhabitants of the Cacarica River Basin in Ríosucio Municipality, Chocó Department. In recent years paramilitary forces operating with the support of the security forces have been responsible for serious human rights violations against members of these communities.

At about 4pm on 29 January, four members of an army-backed paramilitary group operating around the Cacarica River Basin reportedly stopped a female inhabitant of the *Zona Humanitaria Nueva Vida*, New Life Humanitarian Zone of the River Basin. The *Zona Humanitaria Nueva Vida* is one of two civilian communities set up by local people as a means of asserting their right as civilians not to be drawn into the ongoing conflict between the armed forces, their paramilitary allies, and guerrilla forces.

When the paramilitaries reportedly tried to question the woman, she refused to cooperate with them, arguing that as she was a civilian who lived in the *Zona Humanitaria Nueva Vida*. The paramilitaries told her: "*Si usted no quiere seguir hablando, entonces yo sé que usted es de los otros, pronto nos veremos por allá, en su Zona Humanitaria, ya sabe, está advertida.*" ("If you do not want to carry on talking, then we know you are one of them and that soon we will see you there in your Humanitarian Zone, now you know, be warned").

On 30 January, paramilitaries in Ríosucio, the municipal capital, reportedly threatened to launch a raid against both the *Zona Humanitaria Nueva Vida* and the other designated humanitarian zone in the Cacarica River Basin, the *Zona Humanitaria Nueva Esperanza en Dios*. Two days later, on 1 February, a paramilitary gunman in the town of Turbo, Antioquia Department, allegedly stated that a paramilitary raid on *Nueva Vida* which would be followed by an attack on *Nueva Esperanza de Dios*. There are close ties between paramilitaries operating in Chocó Department and Antioquia Department. In the latter department paramilitary structures were supposedly demobilized over a year ago as part of a process initiated by the Colombian government.

Reports suggest that raids on the two humanitarian zones would probably be launched from a paramilitary base known to be in existence in the La Balsa area of the Cacarica River Basin. In recent years Amnesty International has received numerous reports of the presence of this paramilitary base. Its presence has repeatedly been reported to the authorities. However, no action appears to have been taken by the security forces to confront these paramilitaries. In April 2005 the Cacarica River Basin communities also received threats of paramilitary attacks. Although there was no raid, paramilitaries have remained in the area despite the strong presence of the security forces.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Afro-descendent inhabitants of the communities in the Cacarica River Basin area fled their homes in the wake of joint paramilitary-military operations in the region in early 1997. They were able to return to their land between 2000 and 2001. In the past, they came under frequent attack after being labelled guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies, and security force or paramilitary collaborators by guerrillas. The Cacarica communities' insistence on their right as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict and that combatants, whether members of the armed forces, their paramilitary allies or guerrilla forces, remain outside their "humanitarian zones" have resulted in repeated threats and human rights abuses. The vast majority of these abuses have been committed by paramilitaries. Guerrilla forces

operating in the department of Chocó have also been responsible for killing and threatening civilians they accuse of collaborating with their enemies.

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 of the Afro-descendent communities living in the *Nueva Vida* and *Nueva Esperanza en Dios* humanitarian zones in the Cacarica River Basin, following reports of an imminent paramilitary incursion;
- urging the authorities to take all measures that the communities themselves deem appropriate in order to guarantee their safety;
- calling on the authorities to take decisive action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area and to break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

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

Fax: + 57 1 337 5890

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

Minister of Interior

Dr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega

Av. Jiménez No 8-89, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 560 4630 (Please keep trying)

Salutation: Dear Sir / Estimado Sr. Ministro

Minister of Defence

Sr. Camilo Ospina, Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52 OFI. 217

Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN), Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 266 03 51

Salutation: Dear Sir / Estimado Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz

Calle 50, No13-19, Oficina 203

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 20 March 2006.