

15 February 2002

Further information on UA 102/01 (AMR 23/45/2001, 19 April 2001) and follow-up (AMR 23/119/2001, 26 November 2001) - Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA Civilian inhabitants of rural communities of the Alto and Bajo Naya regions and communities on the Yurumanguí River, Valle del Cauca and Cauca Departments

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the Afro-Colombian, indigenous and peasant farmer communities of the Naya River that borders the departments of Valle del Cauca and Cauca and the Yurumanguí River, following reports that a large number of army-backed paramilitaries are amassing in the region to in order to launch attacks in the area.

According to information received on 14 February, paramilitaries based in Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department, are preparing to attack guerrillas in the area. In the past, civilian communities in conflict zones have frequently been labelled guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Following these accusations paramilitary forces have committed serious human rights violations such as extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and death threats. In April 2001, over 30 people were killed by paramilitary forces along the river Naya. The paramilitaries had managed to enter the region en masse despite repeated international alerts of an imminent incursion and despite the heavy military presence around the access points to the Alto Naya where the paramilitary incursion had started.

Since 8 February, an increased paramilitary presence has been reported along the river Anchicayá to the north of the Yurumanguí River. Paramilitaries have reportedly set up illegal checkpoints in the communities of Zabaletas, Llano Bajo and San Marcos, raising concerns for the safety of the civilian population in this area as well.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the peasant farmer, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities living along the Naya River, Yurumanguí River and Anchicayá River in Valle del Cauca and Cauca departments;
- expressing concern about the increasing army-backed paramilitary presence in the region and urging the authorities to take action to protect the civilian population;
- reminding the authorities that if they fail protect the civilian population, it will seem that the paramilitaries are operating with the complicity of the security forces;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Valle del Cauca and Cauca departments, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic
Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango
Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Presidente, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 566 2071 / 562 8930

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

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gustavo Bell

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Fax: + 57 1 222 00 59 / 221 3653

Salutation: Dear Minister Bell / Sr. Ministro Bell

Commander of the III Brigade of the Colombian Army (in charge of Alto Naya region)

Comandante III Brigada del Ejército Nacional

General Francisco René Pedraza

Cali, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante, III Brigada Ejército, Cali

Fax: + 57 2 330 7161 (Say "Me da el tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Commander Pedraza / Sr. Comandante

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Ombudsman

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,

Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,

Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301,

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: National Advocate, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 640 0491

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

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 29 March 2002.