

PUBLIC

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UA 168/98

Fear for safety

2 June 1998

COLOMBIA

Dario GOEZ (killed)

Residents of San José de Apartadó

Fears for the safety of the residents of the peace community, San José de Apartadó, municipality of Apartadó, Antioquia Department, have been heightened following the recent apparent extrajudicial execution of Dario Goetz, a community member, by members of the armed forces.

On 9 May 1998, Colombian armed forces soldiers arrived at the home of Dario Goetz in Arenas Altas, a hamlet close to San José de Apartadó and reportedly opened fire on those inside, wounding him in the leg. They then ordered everyone to leave, including his wife, claiming that they would provide medical assistance to the injured Dario Goetz. Later that day rumours were circulating that the army had killed a "guerrilla fighter" in combat.

Efforts by The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to obtain information from the regional military headquarters concerning the whereabouts of Dario Goetz subsequently failed. On 14 May his body was discovered in the morgue of the hospital in the nearby town of Turbo.

Dario Goetz, who had been a member of the peace community of San José de Apartadó for over a year, had recently returned to his farm in Arenas Altas to harvest his cacao crop. Political violence in the area had forced him and his family to flee Arenas Altas the previous year, along with other peasant farmers, to seek refuge in San José de Apartadó.

Following the killing, a further 20 peasant farmer families in the area have reportedly abandoned their homes and headed to the relative safety of San José de Apartadó.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In March 1997, San José de Apartadó declared itself to be a *Comunidad de Paz*, Peace Community, in an attempt to persuade warring factions to respect their neutrality and right to life. Since the declaration, however, over 30 inhabitants have been killed and two "disappeared" (see UA 393/97, AMR 23/85/97, 16 December 1997 and follow-ups), the majority by army-backed paramilitary groups, the others by members of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a guerrilla group.

The community is made up of around 1,000 people forcibly displaced from their homes in the Urabá region in 1996 and 1997 in the wake of massacres committed by army-backed paramilitaries, and guerrilla groups.

Inhabitants of the community have demanded that the Colombian Government secure conditions for their safe return to the lands they have abandoned. However, they continue to face death threats and other human rights violations and to be labelled guerrilla sympathizers by members of the security forces and their paramilitary allies. The security forces have previously been accused of extrajudicially executing civilians only to claim that the victims were "guerrilla fighters" killed in combat.

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

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the attack by the army on the house of Dario Goez on 9 May 1998 in Arenas Altas, municipality of Apartadó and his subsequent death;
- expressing concern for the safety of all those still resident in the community of San José de Apartadó and for the safety of those returning to their lands;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the region and for members of the security forces responsible for supporting such groups to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated governmental commitments.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño
 Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 286 7434

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gilberto Echeverri Mejía
 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

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez
 Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Apartado Aéreo 29855, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2000 (when answer machine picks up, dial 2017 for fax tone)

Salutation: Estimado Dr. / Dear Dr.

Governor of the Department of Antioquia

Dr. Alberto Builes Ortega
 Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia
 Gobernación de Antioquia, Calle 42B, # 52-106
 Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia

Faxes: + 574 381 1342

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

In appeals to the Governor of Antioquia, acknowledge that although guerrilla forces in Colombian have violated international humanitarian law that this in no way justifies human rights violations by the Colombian security forces and their paramilitary allies.

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz, AA 31861, Santafé de Bogotá

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 14 July 1998.