

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/possible "disappearance"

COLOMBIA

**Indigenous and peasant farmer communities in Tame Municipality, department of Arauca**

**Jairo Fernández (m)**

**Narciso Hernández (m)**

**Israel Camejo (m)**

**Killed:**

**Luis Eder Arévalo (m)**

**Omaira Fernández (f), aged 16**

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of indigenous and peasant farmer communities in Tame Municipality, department of Arauca, after over 800 community members were forcibly displaced in recent weeks. Two indigenous people, including a pregnant 16-year-old, have been killed and three indigenous men are thought to have "disappeared" in a wave of human rights violations committed by paramilitaries operating in collusion with the armed forces.

Between 30 March and 3 April 2003, troops belonging to the *Batallón Navas Pardo*, Navas Pardo Battalion of the XVIII Brigade of the Colombian Army reportedly set up a post in the indigenous reserve (*resguardo*) of Velasqueros in Tame Municipality. During this time gunmen allegedly identifying themselves as paramilitaries threatened members of the community. On 30 March, members of the Colombian Army reportedly entered the community of Betoeyes in Tame Municipality. On the same day, Luis Eder Arévalo was allegedly killed by paramilitaries on the road between Betoeyes and the hamlet of La Holanda. On 27 and 28 April gunmen wearing paramilitary armbands entered the community of Flor Amarillo, Tame Municipality. According to witnesses, several members of the Navas Pardo Battalion were among the paramilitaries. The gunmen ransacked houses and shops in the community.

On 30 April, during a battle between army-backed paramilitaries and guerrilla forces, helicopters of the Colombian armed forces and aircraft reportedly strafed and bombarded the indigenous reserves of Julieros, Velasqueros and Parreros. Armed forces helicopters also reportedly transported both troops and paramilitaries into the area.

On 1 May soldiers of the XVIII Brigade, reportedly wearing armbands of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia and the *Autodefensas Campesinas de Casanare*, (ACC), Self-Defence Forces of Casanare, entered the indigenous communities of Julieros, Velasqueros, Roqueroz, Genareros and Parreros, hamlets of the indigenous reserve of Betoeyes. In Parreros, gunmen reportedly raped and killed a pregnant 16-year-old girl, Omaira Fernández. Her stomach was cut open and the foetus pulled out. Omaira Fernández's body was placed into a bag, which was then reportedly thrown into the River Cravo. On the same day, three indigenous men, Jairo Fernández, Narciso Hernández and Israel Camejo, went missing after allegedly being shot and wounded by the gunmen. It is feared that they may have "disappeared". In the hamlet of Velasqueros the gunmen reportedly raped three other indigenous girls, aged 11, 12 and 15.

Since 12 May, over 300 members of indigenous communities in Tame have fled to the Cristo Rey Church in nearby Saravena Municipality to seek sanctuary from human rights violations. Some 847 indigenous people are currently displaced in Saravena and the Alto Caranal area in Tame Municipality, between Saravena and Tame. Both the indigenous displaced and the peasant farmers are demanding action to ensure that they can

return to their homes and live in safety. Paramilitaries have reportedly threatened members of the displaced indigenous communities saying that they would be killed if they returned.

Concern for the displaced communities is further heightened by the fact that a commanding officer of the XVIII Brigade reportedly accused them of being manipulated by the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, (ELN), National Liberation Army guerrilla group. In the past those accused of sympathizing or collaborating with guerrilla groups have frequently been the victim of serious human rights violations committed by the security forces or their paramilitary allies. Amnesty International has received information indicating strong collusion between units of the XVIII Brigade of the Colombian Army and paramilitaries, including reports of joint military-paramilitary operations or army units wearing paramilitary armbands and identifying themselves as paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern for the safety indigenous and peasant farmer communities of Tame Municipality, department of Arauca;
- calling for an investigation into the killing of Luis Eder Arévalo, the rape and killing of Omaira Fernández and the rape of three other indigenous girls, for the results of the investigations to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of Jairo Fernández, Narciso Hernández and Israel Camejo, who have not been seen since 1 May, and urging the authorities to do everything necessary to establish their whereabouts;
- expressing concern about the increasing army-backed paramilitary presence in the region and urging the authorities to take action to protect the civilian population;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Arauca Department, 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 recommendations made by the United Nations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram: Presidente de la República, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Fax: + 57 1 337 58 90/ 342 05 02**

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

Minister of Defence

Martha Lucía Ramírez de Rincón

Ministra de Defensa Nacional, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52 OFI. 217

Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN), Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram: Ministra Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Fax: + 57 1 266 0193**

**Salutation: Sra Ministra/Dear Minister**

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram: Fiscal General, Bogota, Colombia**

**Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 / 2017 (if someone answers say “me da tono de fax por favor”)**

**Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio**

**COPIES TO:**

National Indigenous Organization

ONIC, AA 32395, 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 16 July 2003.