

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/045/2001

UA 102/01

Fear for Safety

19 April 2001

COLOMBIA

Civilian inhabitants of rural communities in the
municipality of Buenaventura

Paramilitaries, who recently massacred at least 32 peasant farmers, have threatened the civilian population of rural communities in the municipality of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department. Colombian armed forces operating in the area have taken no action to protect the local population, although the Colombian authorities have repeatedly been warned that they are at risk.

On 18 April a large number of army-backed paramilitaries reportedly arrived in the community of Puerto Merizalde in the Bajo Naya area of Buenaventura. They apparently threatened the local population, and ordered them to supply food and transport. They have reportedly also threatened to attack other communities in the Bajo Naya area and on the river Yurumanquí. On 19 April they reportedly travelled towards the municipal capital of Buenaventura.

The same group of paramilitaries were reportedly responsible for a massacre in the Alto Naya area of the Buenos Aires and Timba municipalities on 11 April, during which at least 32 peasant farmers were killed. The paramilitaries apparently entered the area immediately after detachments with the third Brigade of the Colombian Army, *Brigada III*, left the area. In the past the Colombian army have frequently withdrawn from communities in advance of massacres carried out by their paramilitary allies. Since the massacre, many civilians living in the area have fled their homes. At least 3000 people, the majority of whom are members of the Paez indigenous or afro-Colombian communities, are believed to have been forcibly displaced as a result of the paramilitary incursions.

As recently as 2 April, the Inter-American Committee for Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS) called on the Colombian authorities to guarantee the security of civilian communities in the northern Cauca. In March, national human rights organizations also alerted the authorities to the possibility of paramilitary massacres. The human rights ombudsman, Dr Eduardo Cifuentes, has apparently said to the Colombian press that the local population asked the Colombian authorities for protection in December 2000. Despite the repeated warnings, the Colombian authorities have failed to take any action against the paramilitaries. On 19 April some army contingents reportedly arrived in the Bajo Naya area, but there are no reports that they have made any effort to confront paramilitary forces. This raises concern that the paramilitaries will be able to continue massacring civilians in the region unhindered.

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

- expressing concern the civilian population of rural communities in the municipality of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department, have reportedly been threatened by paramilitaries;
- urging the authorities to take all appropriate measures to protect the civilian population, while reminding them that if they fail to do so, it will seem that the paramilitaries are operating with the complicity of the security forces;
- calling for the threats to be fully and impartially investigated, and for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the massacre of at least 32 peasant farmers in the Alto Naya area in the municipalities of Buenos Aires and Timba, urging that results are made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Valle del Cauca 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 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

Fax: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Minister of Defence
 Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña
 Ministro 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 1874

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

Commander of the Colombian Armed Forces
 Comandante General de las Fuerzas Militares
 General Fernando Tapias Stahelin
 Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52
 Santafé de Bogotá
 Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 222 2096 / 221 3653 / 2222935

Salutation: Dear General / Sr. General

Commander of the III Brigade of the Colombian Army
 Comandante III Brigada del Ejército Nacional
 General Francisco Rene Pedraza
 Cali, Valle del Cauca
 Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante, III Brigada, Cali

Salutation: Dear General / Sr. General

COPIES TO:

Alternative Legal Association
 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 31 May 2001.