

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 23/48/96

UA 224/96 "Disappearance" / Apparent
Extrajudicial Executions / Fear for Safety 26 September 1996

COLOMBIA Patricia TABORDA (f)
Marina RAMOS (f), aged 38
Ana ISABEL (f)
Eny (f)

Doris de Jesús VERGARA (f), aged 30

Nicanor CASTRO, aged 38, shopkeeper
Francisco BALLESTEROS GARCÍA, aged 55
Marcelino BALLESTEROS GUEVARA, aged 26

Four women are reported to have "disappeared" after being abducted from the village of Gilgal, in the northwestern department of Chocó, by members of a paramilitary group. Amnesty International is deeply concerned for their safety and that of other members of the civilian population in this remote region of Colombia, especially in the light of the reported killing of a fifth woman and three men, two on 19 September 1996 in Gilgal. Paramilitary activity is continuing in the area.

According to information received, members of a paramilitary group detained Doris de Jesús Vergara Mercado on 24 June 1996. She was reportedly violently beaten in front of her eight children and her baby son Fredy was violently taken from her arms. Doris de Jesús Vergara was subsequently tied up alongside four other women: Eny, a mother of five children, Patricia Taborda, Marina Ramos, a mother of 10 children who was also reportedly beaten, and Ana Isabel, a mother of a one-year-old child. Doris de Jesús Vergara Mercado was then killed. The paramilitary group beat the other women and threatened to kill them. The four have not been seen since.

On 27 June, in the town of Santa María del Darién, which is situated a short distance from Gilgal, Nicanor Castro was reportedly forced off his boat, beaten and killed by members of a paramilitary group.

On 19 September at about 6am, a group of about 20 paramilitaries entered Gilgal firing their weapons. During the attack the group killed Francisco Ballesteros García, a father of nine children, and Marcelino Ballesteros Guevara, one of his sons. The two victims were reportedly forced out of their home, taken to a park close to their home and killed.

The paramilitary group continued firing for a further two hours and as they left the town members of the group claimed they had been responsible for having "cleansed" the neighbouring town of Marsella and shouted slogans in support of a Fidel Castaño, a paramilitary leader against whom there are several outstanding arrest warrants for serious human rights violations.

The paramilitary gunmen reportedly returned to Santa María del Darién, where 200 of its members are reported to have set up a base. It is also reported that the group has repeatedly made public the fact that it is in constant communication with the Colombian army base in Unguía.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite repeated promises by President Ernesto Samper Pizano to improve the human rights situation in Colombia, members of the security forces together with their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. His promises include a commitment to dismantle the paramilitary groups, but no steps have been taken to control their actions or to hold members accountable for widespread human rights violations.

Many paramilitary groups have their origins in the civilian "self-defence" squads which the army created in the 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombia armed forces to combat and disband such groups, they have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents with impunity in many areas of the country and continue to work with the support of the security forces.

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

- expressing deep concern for the safety of Patricia Taborda, Marina Ramos, Ana Isabel and Eny who have not been seen since their abduction on 24 June 1996 from Gilgal, department of Chocó, by a paramilitary group;
- urging that, if they are in detention, they be treated humanely and allowed access to lawyers, relatives and medical treatment, and that they be charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released immediately;
- expressing deep concern at the apparent extrajudicial executions of Doris de Jesús Vergara Mercado on 24 June, Nicanor Castro on 27 June in Santa María del Darién and Francisco Ballesteros García and Marcelino Ballesteros Guevara on 19 September in Gilgal by a paramilitary group;
- calling for prompt, full and impartial investigations into these violations, for the results to be made public, and those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of members of the civilian population of Gilgal, Santa María del Darién and neighbouring communities and calling for immediate measures to guarantee their safety;

If possible also:

- call for full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Gilgal and neighbouring areas and that those members of the security forces responsible for supporting such groups be brought to justice;
- urge the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with governmental commitments.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 289 3377/286 7434

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

2) Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación

Calle 35 No. 4-31, Apartado Aéreo 29855

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 287 0939 or 288 2828

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso

3) Minister of Defence

Dr. Juan Carlos Esguerra Portocarrero

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Ministro de Defensa, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes:42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes:+ 57 1 222 1874/288 4906

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz

AA 31861, 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 19 November 1996.