

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

25 July 2003

COLOMBIA

Afro-Colombian communities in the rivers Anchicayá, Raposo and Mallorquín, in the municipality of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the afro-Colombian communities in the hamlets of the rivers Anchicayá, Raposo and Mallorquín, in the rural area of the Buenaventura municipality, Valle del Cauca Department. This follows reports that army-backed paramilitaries have threatened the communities and have already killed several people.

On 2 July, paramilitaries were reportedly seen travelling unhindered by boat towards the rural area of the Buenaventura municipality from the bay of Buenaventura, despite the fact that the area is heavily militarized. The same group are believed to be responsible for the deaths of four people in the neighbourhood of Dignidad in the Buenaventura municipality on 27 June. The dead were reportedly accused of being guerrilla members by the paramilitaries.

On 14 June, the authorities were informed about the movement of army-backed paramilitaries toward the river Anchicayá. Despite this, six people were reportedly killed and another 15 injured at a family party, when a paramilitary incursion occurred in the Zabaletas community in the municipality of Buenaventura. The paramilitaries had reportedly passed by a military check point manned by the *II Brigada de la Infanteria de Marina*, Second Brigade of Marine Infantry on their way to the municipality of Buenaventura.

According to witnesses, some of the men responsible for the Zabaletas massacre were seen the following day at a permanent check-point controlled by army-backed paramilitaries, at the entrance to the area. Army-backed paramilitaries belonging to the *Bloque Pacífico de Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia have reportedly stated that their mission is "to clean" the lower part of the Anchicayá River, which is very close to a Hydro-electric plant in the region. In February, the authorities were informed about a possible army-backed paramilitary incursion in the same area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Army-backed paramilitaries have a strong presence in the municipality of Buenaventura and have committed serious human rights violations against the local population in the region.

In April 2001, over 30 people were killed by paramilitary forces along the river Naya, between the departments of Valle del Cauca and Cauca. The paramilitaries had managed to enter the region en masse, despite repeated international alerts of an imminent incursion and also despite the heavy military presence around the access points to the Alto Naya where the paramilitary incursion had started (See UA 102/01 AMR 23/045/2001, 21 April 2001). Other massacres have been committed in El Firme and Zabaletas.

Following the Naya massacre many civilians living in the area have fled their homes. At least 3,000 people, the majority of whom are members of the Paez indigenous or Afro-Colombian communities, were believed to have been forcibly displaced as a result of the paramilitary incursions. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for threats and killings of civilians they accuse of collaborating with their enemies.

The threat for the safety of these communities is so serious that in the past 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, as it did on 2 April 2001.

Despite the repeated warnings, the Colombian armed forces have failed to take decisive action against the paramilitaries and to guarantee the safety of civilian communities in the region. Guerrilla forces operating in the region have been responsible for numerous killings of those they consider to be siding with their enemies.

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

- expressing concern for the afro-Colombian population of rural communities in the municipality of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department, whose safety is at risk due to the strong presence of army-backed paramilitaries in the area;
- 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 14 June and 27 June reported massacres in Zabaletas and the Dignidad district of Buenaventura respectively 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 the United Nations recommendations.

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 92

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

Minister of Defence

Ministra de Defensa Nacional
Martha Lucía Ramírez de Rincón
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

Governor of Valle del Cauca Department

Sr. Germán Villegas Villegas,
Gobernador del Departamento de Valle del Cauca, Gobernación de Valle del Cauca,
Palacio de San Francisco, Carrera 60, Calles 90 y 100, Santiago de Cali, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Telegram: Gobernador Valle del Cauca, Cali, Colombia

Fax: +57 2 8860150 (if someone answers say: Me da tono de fax por favor)

Salutation: Dear Governor /Sr. Gobernador

COPIES TO:

National Advocate for the people

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,
Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,
Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301,
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Defensor del Pueblo, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 640 0491

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Cifuentes Muñoz / Dear Mr. 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 5 September 2003.