

UA 136/01

Fear for Safety

4 June 2001

COLOMBIA

**Forcibly displaced civilian communities of the Cacarica River Basin area and other displaced communities in the department of Chocó**

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A large number of army-backed paramilitaries are converging on the Cacarica River Basin (*Cuenca del Cacarica*) area in the department of Chocó. They are reportedly planning to attack the communities of the Cacarica River Basin and other communities in the area, whose inhabitants have recently returned to resettlement camps after being forced to flee from their homes in 1997.

On 17 May a written note sent to a non-governmental human rights organization, *Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz*, Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace, warned that displaced people who have returned to the Cacarica area should abandon their homes immediately, as they would come under attack in late May or early June. The organization later received information that an attack on the resettlement camps of "Esperanza en Dios" and "Nueva Vida" would be launched from an area known as La Balsa to the south of the Cacarica River Basin, and from the north.

Since then, paramilitary activity in the Cacarica River Basin area has increased, despite a strong security force presence in the region. Paramilitary gunmen have been seen travelling up the Atrato river towards the area from the direction of the heavily-militarised port of Turbo. On 30 May a large group of paramilitary gunmen were seen in La Balsa. On 31 May a group of 5 paramilitary gunmen were seen near the "Nueva Vida" settlement, and later that day more than a dozen unidentified men thought to be paramilitaries were seen travelling up a tributary of the Atrato river towards the settlement. A military operation also took place on 31 May, and a military helicopter reportedly flew over the "Esperanza en Dios" settlement three times.

On 27 May, a group of paramilitary gunmen killed peasant farmer Laureano Sierra in the Katíos National Park (*Parque Nacional de los Katíos*), north of the Cacarica River Basin. They reportedly told local inhabitants, who retrieved the body, that they were planning to attack Cacarica and the nearby communities of Salaquí, Truandó and Domingodó.

On 6 May, human rights organizations reportedly learned that 400 members of the *Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá*, (ACCU), Peasant Farmer Self-Defence Groups of Córdoba and Urabá, were preparing to attack the Cacarica communities.

The increase in paramilitary activity raises serious concern for forcibly displaced communities in the area, including those mentioned above and the "Peace Communities" of San Francisco de Asís and Nuestra Señora del Carmen, which have previously been attacked by paramilitaries (See UA 64/99, AMR 23/029/99, 6 April 1999). The "Peace Communities" together with the communities of the Cacarica River Basin have called on both sides in the conflict to respect their right to life and their right as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The inhabitants of the communities in the Cacarica River Basin area and of the "Peace Communities" have recently resettled in the area after they were forced to flee their homes in the wake of joint paramilitary-military operations in the region in early 1997. In the past, they came under frequent attack after being labelled guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies, and security force/paramilitary collaborators by the guerrilla. During the resettlement process, several members of the communities have been killed and "disappeared", including community leader Freddy Gallego (see UA 240/00, AMR 23/058/00, 14 August 2000 and follow-up).

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the recently returned displaced communities in the Cacarica River Basin area, and for the San Francisco de Asis and Nuestra Señora del Carmen "Peace Communities" in Chocó following increased paramilitary activity in the area;
- urging the authorities to take all measures that the communities themselves deem appropriate to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Chocó, despite repeated commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Chocó, 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 and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and UN 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

**Faxes: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351/286 74 34/ 286 68 42/284 21 86**

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

Minister of Defence  
 Dr. Gustavo Bell  
 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**

**Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874/288 4906**

**Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro**

Governor of the Department of Chocó  
 Sr. William Halaby Córdoba  
 Gobernador del Departamento del Chocó  
 Gobernación del Chocó  
 Quibdó, Chocó, Colombia

**Fax: +57 4 97 11777**

**Salutation: Sr. Gobernador/Dear Governor**

**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 16 July 2001.