

UA 243/99

Fear for safety / Extrajudicial execution

16 September

COLOMBIA Civilian population of the communities of Monterralo, San Benito, and Cupíagua in Casanare department and Pajarito in Boyocá department

Killed: Ramón Albeiro Rojas, Misael Monroy, Uldarico Vargas

There is grave concern for the safety of the civilian inhabitants of San Benito, Pajarito, Monterralo and Cupíagua villages after paramilitary forces killed the three people named above in Monterralo and told the remaining population to leave the area or be killed.

On 21 August 1999 at about 7pm, armed men in military-style uniforms entered the village of Monterralo. Using a list of names, they dragged 20 community members from their homes and lined them up, accusing them of being guerrilla sympathizers. Ramón Alberio Rojas, Uldarico Vargas and Misael Monroy, a community leader, were then taken aside and shot dead. The paramilitary group told the rest of the local population that they had a week to leave before the paramilitary group returned to kill anyone who remained. In the days following the attack the local population fled the town, seeking safety in local urban areas. Some have now begun to return, despite the threat.

The paramilitary force managed to enter Monterralo and carry out the killings in spite of the presence of military checkpoints on the access road to the village, and a two-month-old military curfew in the region which, with the exception of the paramilitary incursion, had rigorously prohibited the transit of all vehicles and movement of people after 6pm. Units of the army's XVI Brigade stationed nearby, despite being informed of the paramilitary attack, failed to reach the village for over an hour after the paramilitary group had withdrawn.

Monterralo is situated on a strategic road linking the lowlands of resource-rich areas of Casanare with the main centres of population in the highlands. Other communities on the road such as San Benito, Pajarito, and Cupíagua have also reportedly been threatened by paramilitary forces seeking to consolidate their control of the area. The area has seen increasing conflict over recent years with the exploitation of oil reserves by foreign companies and a heavy army and paramilitary presence to combat insurgent groups, which have long been active in the department.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peasant communities in disputed zones in Colombia's long-running civil conflict have frequently suffered human rights violations. Army-backed paramilitary groups extend their territorial control by killing community leaders and anyone else they consider guerrilla sympathizers, then using threats to forcibly displace the remaining population. Guerrilla groups kill those they consider to be collaborating with the paramilitary and army. Neither side in the conflict recognizes the civilian population's right to life and neutrality.

Members of the Colombian Security Forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Over the past five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. The Colombian government suspended the legal basis for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989, yet they continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian populations of San Benito, Monterralo and Cupiagua in Casanare department and Pajarito in Boyacá department;
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of the inhabitants;
- calling for full, prompt and impartial investigations into the killing of Ramón Alberio Rojas, Uldarico Vargas and Misael Monroy in Monterralo on 21 August 1999;
- urging that the results of the investigations be made public and that the perpetrators be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into possible links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Casanare department, and urging that those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/ 284 2186/ 337 1351

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Pastrana

Commander of XVI Brigade

Comandante de la XVI Brigada
XVI Brigada del Ejército
Yopal, Casanare
Colombia

Salutation: Sr Comandante/ Dear Commander

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Néstor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministerio del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Fax:+ 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5884 / 342 3201

Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

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

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO: Attorney General

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Apartado Aéreo 29855, 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 28 October 1999.