

UA 260/99

Fear for**COLOMBIA Forcibly displaced communities of the Cacarica River Basin**

Paramilitary groups are threatening to kill representatives of the forcibly displaced communities of the Cacarica River Basin, who are preparing to return to the homes they were forced out of by a joint army and paramilitary offensive in 1997. There is reportedly a strong guerrilla and paramilitary presence around the area they are to return to, and Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

In February 1997 some 3,800 people were forcibly displaced from their homes in Cuenca de Cacarica, in Chocó department, by a large-scale joint offensive by the army and paramilitary forces. They are now living in shelters in Antioquia and Chocó departments. On 6 October 1999, representatives of the communities will sign provisional agreements with the government which will permit them to begin returning to their homes. A group of 80 are then expected to travel to the Cacarica River Basin on 13 October to prepare the area for the rest of the community to return. A further 2,500 are to return in four phases, the first beginning on 2 November.

The community has been negotiating conditions for its return with the Colombian government. They want state authorities to take measures to guarantee their safety, and are calling for a commitment on the part of the security forces to control strategic access points to the Cacarica river basin in order to prevent incursions by paramilitary groups or guerrilla forces. The community is also calling for civilian judicial bodies, the *Defensoría del Pueblo*, Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, *Fiscalía General de la Nación*, Office of the Attorney General, and the *Procuraduría General de la Nación*, Office of the Procurator General, to be on hand in the areas they are returning to, to help prevent and investigate possible human rights violations or violations of international humanitarian law by the security forces, their paramilitary allies or armed opposition groups.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When they fled the military and paramilitary offensive in February 1997, the communities of the Cacarica River Basin sought refuge in Bocas del Atrato and Turbo, municipality of Turbo, department of Antioquia. Others sought refuge in Panamá before being repatriated to Bahía Cupica, municipality of Bahía Solano, department of Chocó. Since then they have been living in shelters in Bocas del Atrato and the municipal capital, Turbo, and in Bahía Cupica.

During the offensive many people accused of being guerrilla collaborators or sympathizers by the paramilitaries and the armed forces were extrajudicially executed or "disappeared". Many other people were forced to flee their homes by threats or killings by guerrilla groups in the department of Chocó and elsewhere. Those displaced are often considered to be guerrilla sympathizers or collaborators by the armed forces and their paramilitary allies, and as a result are often the victims of death threats and serious human rights violations (see UA 246/98, AMR 23/71/98, 17 September 1998 and UA 03/99, AMR 23/01/99, 8 January 1999).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the displaced communities in Bahía Cupica and Bocas del Atrato, Chocó department, and Turbo, Antioquia department, particularly as they take steps to return to their homes;
- calling on the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by the communities themselves to guarantee their safety.

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

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

If possible please send appeals to your own government expressing concern for the security of the displaced communities as they initiate their return, and urging them to monitor efforts by the Colombian authorities to implement measures, as deemed appropriate by the communities themselves, to guarantee their safety.

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 November 1999.