

15 August 2002

Further information on UA 102/01 (AMR 23/045/2001, 19 April 2001) and follow-ups (AMR 23/075/2001, 8 August 2001, AMR 23/119/2001, 26 November 2001, AMR 23/012/2002, 28 January 2002, and AMR 23/019/2002, 15 February 2002) - Fear for safety

COLOMBIA **Civilian inhabitants of rural communities of the Alto and Bajo Naya regions and communities of the Yurumaguí River, Valle del Cauca and Cauca Department**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the Afro-Colombian, indigenous and peasant farmer communities of the Naya River that borders the departments of Valle del Cauca and Cauca and the Yurumanguí River, following reports of an imminent launch of attacks in the area.

Paramilitaries based in the Valle del Cauca and Cauca Departments are reportedly preparing to attack guerrilla forces in the same area. In recent months, there has been an enormous increase in action by army-backed paramilitary groups in some municipalities of these departments. Paramilitary threats against the civilian population there have also reportedly increased.

Amnesty International fears that, as on previous occasions, civilian communities in conflict zones will be labelled as guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Paramilitary forces will then be able to use this as an excuse to commit serious human rights violations such as extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and death threats.

The threat of attack is apparently so imminent that on 11 July, the Human Rights Ombudsman activated the early alert system (*alerta temprana*), calling for an immediate response by state authorities. This system is only activated when there is a clear threat to the human rights of the population. To date, Amnesty International has not received any information to indicate that state authorities have taken decisive action to confront paramilitary forces in the area.

On 6 July, on the road between Guachicono and Bolívar, Cauca department, a van carrying some people living in the area was reportedly stopped by army-backed paramilitaries. The passengers were forced to get out of the van and kneel down. The paramilitaries then insulted and ill-treated them as they knelt. Later, paramilitaries threatened them and played a game of "Russian roulette", pointing a gun to their heads. They threatened the people, saying: "*Las Autodefensas han llegado*", ("The Self-Defence Forces have arrived").

On 10 July, paramilitaries entered other municipalities of the area. In the municipality of La Vega, Cauca department, army-backed paramilitaries with distinctive AUC bracelets wrote graffiti on the walls saying: "*Del Urabá al Cauca. Territorio AUC*," ("From Urabá to Cauca. AUC Territory") and "*Guerrillero que cojamos le volamos la cabeza*", ("[If a] guerrilla member [is] caught we will blow his head off").

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Army-backed paramilitaries have a strong presence in the area and have committed serious human rights violations against the population. In April 2001, over 30 people were killed by paramilitary forces along the river Naya. The paramilitaries had managed to enter the region en masse despite repeated international alerts of an imminent incursion and despite the heavy military presence around the access points to the Alto Naya where the paramilitary incursion had started.

Since the 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, are 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.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of all the communities living along the Naya River, Yurumanguí River and Anchicayá River in Valle del Cauca and Cauca departments;
- expressing concern about the increasing army-backed paramilitary presence in the region and urging the authorities to take action to protect the civilian population;
- reminding the authorities that if they fail protect the civilian population, it will seem that the paramilitaries are operating with the complicity of the security forces;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Valle del Cauca and Cauca departments, 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 United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Dr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Presidente, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 566 2071 / 562 8930

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

Minister of Defence

Dra. Martha Lucía Ramírez

Ministra de Defensa Nacional, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministra de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 42411 INPRE CO / 44561 CFAC CO

Fax: + 57 1 222 00 59 / 221 3653

Salutation: Dear Minister Ramírez / Sra. Ministra Ramírez

Commander of the III Brigade of the Colombian Army (in charge of Alto Naya region)

Comandante III Brigada del Ejército Nacional

General Francisco René Pedraza

Cali, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante, III Brigada Ejército, Cali

Fax: + 57 2 330 7161 (Say "Me da el tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Commander Pedraza / Sr. Comandante

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Ombudsman

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,

Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,

Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301,

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: National Advocate, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 640 0491

Salutation: Dear Mr. Cifuentes Muñoz / Estimado Sr. Cifuentes Muñoz

Non-governmental human rights organization

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 26 September 2002.