

# URGENT ACTION

## MEMBERS OF PEACE COMMUNITY HELD CAPTIVE

**On 28 November, members of a Colombian community that asserts its right not to be part of the country's long-running conflict were held captive for several hours by paramilitaries. Members of this Peace Community, in San José de Apartadó in Northern Colombia, are in serious danger.**

On 28 November, almost 200 paramilitaries came to the hamlet of La Esperanza, Apartadó Municipality, Antioquia Department, which is one of several hamlets and villages forming the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó**. Those who live in the Peace Community refuse to take sides with any of the parties to the armed conflict in Colombia - guerrilla groups, paramilitaries and the armed forces.

Around 50 people, some of them members of the Peace Community, were held captive in the health centre in La Esperanza for several hours. The paramilitaries took the names of those held captive, saying they would "investigate" them. The paramilitaries came from a base in Playa Larga, a hamlet close to La Esperanza, where they own land. They have told local residents that they will take control of any land they require, regardless of the owner's wishes. Paramilitaries have also made known that they would do the same in other hamlets nearby.

On 19 and 20 November, paramilitaries set up checkpoints on roads around La Esperanza and two other hamlets close to the Peace Community. They stopped and questioned anyone travelling on these roads, taking whatever food those they stopped had with them. They told these people that they were forbidden to take food back to their houses. These threats come at a time when there have been reports that paramilitaries have consolidated their presence in the areas around the Peace Community, despite the fact that the area is heavily militarized.

### **Please write immediately, in Spanish or your own language:**

- Expressing concern for the safety of the members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó;
- Urging the Colombian authorities to order full and impartial investigations into the threats against members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Reminding the Colombian authorities of the right of civilians – including members of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community -not to be drawn into the armed conflict;
- Urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 JANUARY 2012 TO:**

#### President

Señor Juan Manuel Santos  
 Presidente de la República,  
 Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26,  
 Bogotá, Colombia  
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631

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

#### Defence Minister

Señor Juan Carlos Pinzón  
 Ministerio de Defensa  
 Carrera 54, no.26-29  
 Bogotá COLOMBIA  
 Fax: +57 1 266 1003

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

#### **And copies to:**

Peace Community  
 Comunidad de Paz de  
 San José de Apartadó  
 AA 243 de Apartadó  
 Antioquia  
 Colombia

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 103/11. Further information:

[www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/009/2011/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/009/2011/en)

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó consists of individuals living in a number of hamlets and villages in the municipality of Apartadó, in Antioquia Department, north-western Colombia, who defend their right not to be drawn into Colombia's armed conflict and refuse to take sides with any of the parties to the conflict. The Peace Community refuses to bear arms or to provide information or logistical support to either side. In return, they demand that the parties to the conflict do not enter their communities and that they respect their decision not to participate in or to collaborate with the warring parties.

Since the Peace Community's formation on 23 March 1997, more than 170 of its members or other civilians living in the area have been killed or subjected to enforced disappearance, while others have been threatened or sexually assaulted. Those in the Peace Community are in constant danger. The majority of these killings have been carried out by paramilitaries who continue to operate with the support and acquiescence of members of the armed forces in the area. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for killings of members of the Peace Community. Over the last decade many civilians who are not members of the Peace Community, but who are close to them or living in the area, have also been killed. Many of the killings coincide with periods of intense threats against the Peace Community and appear to be part of attempts to intimidate its members.

Civilians who defend their right not to be drawn into Colombia's armed conflict are met with suspicion and hostility from the army, the paramilitaries and guerrilla groups.

Colombia's paramilitary groups supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003, but it is clear from the killing and the threats against human rights defenders in different parts of the country, that they are still operating.

During the course of the conflict, the security forces and paramilitary groups have frequently labelled human rights organizations and trade unions as guerrilla collaborators or supporters, and have gone on to threaten, abduct or kill them. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders, trade unionists and other civilians they consider to be siding with their enemies.

Name: The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó

Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 103/11 Index: AMR 23/035/2011 Issue Date: 1 December 2011