

PUBLIC

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17 January 2003

UA 16/03 Fear for safety / possible "disappearance"

COLOMBIA Luz Cenid Hernández (f), aged 27  
Unidentified taxi driver (m)  
The civilian population of the Tame municipality, department of Arauca

**Killed: Nine people, including four members of the same family**

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Luz Cenid Hernández, and an unidentified taxi driver are feared to have "disappeared" after being stopped at a paramilitary checkpoint in the Tame municipality, department of Arauca on 31 December 2002. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety and that of the civilian population of the municipality following the death of nine people, including four members of the same family, at the beginning of January 2003.

On 31 December 2002, more than 50 men wearing arm bands of the paramilitary group, *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia reportedly set up a checkpoint on the road from Betoyes hamlet to the Pueblo Nuevo hamlet in the Tame municipality. Witnesses claim that several of those wearing the AUC arm bands were members of the *Batallón Navas Pardo*, Navas Pardo Battalion of the armed forces and members of the national police who had maintained the checkpoint for 20 days previous to the paramilitary incursion. The police and the armed forces reportedly left the checkpoint two hours before the AUC appeared.

The AUC reportedly surrounded the Betoyes hamlet, threatened the population with further paramilitary incursions and detained several vehicles at the checkpoint. Luz Cenid Hernández was reportedly forced from her car and her whereabouts remain unknown. The majority of vehicles detained reportedly belonged to the *Cootransmilenio* taxi company, a cooperative whose members have been accused by the security forces of being guerrillas and guerrilla auxiliaries. One of the drivers was killed and the whereabouts of another driver remain unknown since his abduction by the AUC. The AUC reportedly threatened to kill all drivers that belonged to the company.

On 3 January 2003, on the road from Betoyes to Tame city centre José Luis Ortiz Guerrero and the brothers José Francisco and Henry Alexander Maldonado Sandoval were killed, reportedly by members of an armed opposition group. On 4 January on the road from Tame to the neighbouring municipality of Saravena, Yanhet Rodríguez Moreno was killed by two unidentified men after she was forced from her car, despite the fact that there is a police and army presence nearby in an area known as the "Y". Also on 4 January in the "Y", where the road from Betoyes splits in two directions, towards the municipalities of Puerto Rondon and Saravena, another checkpoint was reportedly set up by four men believed to be members of a paramilitary group. A vehicle was reportedly stopped and its occupants were made to get out. The vehicle and its owner, Disney Botia Bernal were driven away by the men towards Puerto Rondon where Disney was killed. On 6 January on the road from Tame to Cabuya municipality, unknown gunmen killed a family of four, including a one-year-old girl, Yeradin Vega Albarracin.

Amnesty International is further concerned for the civilian population because despite denunciations to the authorities by those affected by the 31 December AUC checkpoint and by national human rights organizations, paramilitary groups were able to maintain their presence in the municipality and continue to threaten, harass and kill the civilian population.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Army-backed paramilitary forces have been able to consolidate their presence in the department of Arauca despite the large presence of the security forces in the department. Paramilitary forces have reportedly been able to operate checkpoints in close proximity to military positions for prolonged periods of time.

According to reports, there were 180 killings in the Tame municipality in 2002. Amnesty International has previously documented our concerns regarding the civilian population and social activists in the Tame municipality. On 8 November, José Rusbell Lara, member of the *Comité Regional de Derechos Humanos "Joel Sierra"*, "Joel Sierra" Regional Human Rights Committee was reportedly shot dead by two gunmen, thought to be members of army-backed paramilitary, in central Tame (see UA 337/02, AMR 23/129/2002, 14 November 2002).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian population of Tame municipality, department of Arauca, who are at risk following paramilitary incursions in the area;
- urging the authorities to order an independent, impartial and conclusive investigation into the possible disappearance of Luz Cenid Hernández Grajales and an unidentified driver for the *Cootransmilenio* taxi company; for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to immediately launch a comprehensive and impartial investigation into the deaths of the nine people in the municipality of Tame, to make public its results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the armed forces and illegal paramilitary groups in the department of Arauca, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

## **APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram:      Presidente de la República, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Fax:             + 57 1 342 0592**

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

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,

Fiscal General de la Nación

Fiscalía General de la Nación

Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite)

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram:      Fiscal General, Bogota, Colombia**

**Fax:             + 57 1 570 2022 / 2017 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")**

**Salutation:    Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio**

National Advocate for the people

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,

Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,

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

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax:             + 57 1 640 0491**

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

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental human rights organization

*Reiniciar*

AA 16284

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 February 2003.