

UA 126/02

Fear for**COLOMBIA** Edwin Orlando Salázar Mosquera (m)

Edwin Orlando Salázar Mosquera was reportedly abducted by army-backed paramilitaries on 22 April, and has not been seen since. He lives in a community in the Cacarica River basin, made up of people trying to return to their lands, who had been driven out by military and paramilitary operations.

He was reportedly travelling up the river Atrato with a group of people, heading for the municipality of Turbo. At about 7pm, in the community of Tumaradó, paramilitary gunmen forced their boats to stop, and asked which of them was Edwin Orlando. When he came forward the gunmen apparently tied his arms and legs, and asked the others whether he had any links with guerrilla groups operating in the region. They also asked why he had not left the Cacarica River basin in two years. His companions replied that he lived in Nueva Vida, one of two resettlement communities in the Cacarica River Basin.

The paramilitaries ordered the others to leave, and told them that if anyone asked where Edwin Orlando was, they should say "he is disappeared" ("*digan que se encuentra desaparecido*") The paramilitaries reportedly warned them, "*no vayan a decir nada porque les puede costar*", "don't say anything about this or it will cost you".

Amnesty International has received frequent reports that paramilitary forces are operating in Tumaradó, along the River Atrato, despite the heavy presence of troops in the area from the XVII Brigade and Riverine Battalion No 50.

On 23 April the Colombian Army told Amnesty International that Riverine Battalion No 50 had set up checkpoints up and downstream on the day of the abduction to catch those responsible.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People living in the Cacarica River Basin area were forced out of their homes by joint paramilitary-military operations in early 1997, and fled to other communities in the region. In the past few years many of them have returned to their lands.

The security forces and their paramilitary allies have often accused them of collaborating with the guerrillas who operate in the region, and the paramilitaries have often threatened and attacked them. While they have been returning to their homes, several members of the communities have "disappeared" or been killed, including community leader Freddy Gallego (see UA 240/00, AMR 23/058/00, 14 August 2000 and follow-ups).

The Cacarica River basin is heavily militarised, but paramilitary forces have been able to enter the area and operate unhindered, despite repeated alerts to the Colombian security forces (See UA 136/01, AMR 23/055/2001, 4 June 2001, and the report *Colombia: Return to Hope*, AMR 23/23/00, June 2000).

Guerrilla groups have also killed, or threatened to kill, members of returned displaced communities in Chocó Department.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Edwin Orlando Salá, who was abducted by army-backed paramilitaries on 22 April and whose whereabouts are now unknown;

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the returned displaced communities in the Cacarica River Basin area and indigenous communities living in the same area, in the light of reports of a heavy paramilitary presence in the region;
- urging the authorities to take all measures that the communities themselves deem appropriate to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Chocó, despite repeated commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Chocó, 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 and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO:President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: + 57 1 566 2071**Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente**Minister of Defence

Dr. Gustavo Bell

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia**Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO****Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874****Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro**Commander of the XVII Brigade of the Colombian Army

General Pablo Rodríguez Laverde

Carepa, Urabá, Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante XVII Brigada, Carepa, Urabá, Colombia**Fax: + 57 4 823 6601/823 6844/823 6605/823 6796/823 6601****Salutation: Dear Commander/Sr Comandante****COPIES TO:**Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz

AA 31861, 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 5 June 2002.