

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/081/2001

21 August 2001

Further information on UA 52/01 (AMR 23/029/2001, 9 March 2001) and follow-up (AMR 23/073/2001, 31 July 2001) - Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA                      Inhabitants of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó

**New names: Peace Community of Natividad de María and other forcibly displaced communities which have returned to their lands in the department of Chocó**

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Paramilitary gunmen, backed by the army, are continuing to threaten forcibly displaced communities who have returned to their lands in the departments of Chocó and Antioquia unless they once again abandon the region. Some of the returning displaced communities have declared themselves to be "Peace Communities" as a means to call on the two sides in the conflict to respect their right to life as civilians and to respect their right not to be drawn into the conflict.

Most recently the *Comunidad de Paz de Natividad de María*, Peace Community of Natividad de María has come under attack.

On 2 August, a group of between 100 and 200 paramilitaries reportedly entered the hamlet of Bocas de Curbaradó (Mouth of the River Curbaradó), department of Chocó, which is part of the Peace Community of Natividad de María. The gunmen rounded up the inhabitants and accused them of being guerilla sympathisers, and threatened to kill them.

According to information received, the day before the paramilitaries arrived, peasant farmer Orfides Flores had gone out to gather food for his family, and had not returned. Police removed a mutilated body, believed to be his, from the Atrato River on 3 August.

On 14 July, members of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who work with the Peace Communities travelling with international delegates by boat from the community of Caño Claro, which is on a tributary of the Curbaradó river were forced to stop by paramilitary gunmen of the *Autodefensas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. The paramilitaries reportedly ordered 53 members of the community who were travelling with the delegation aside and threatened them ordering them to abandon their lands.

These events have raised concerns for the safety of all the Peace Communities in the department of Chocó and the returned communities of the Cacarica River Basin. There is reported to be a continued strong paramilitary presence to the south of the Cacarica River Basin and in late June paramilitaries reportedly threatened civilian communities of the Salaquí River Basin that they intended to take this land from them.

It is of concern that despite national and international denunciations the armed forces have taken no decisive action to confront the paramilitaries despite the fact that the Atrato River is heavily-militarized. Concerns for the Peace Communities have been heightened by a further paramilitary incursion against the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.

On 30 July, the community of La Unión fled to San José de Apartadó after paramilitaries threatened to kill the villagers who refused to collaborate with them, if they did not leave the area. A boy who tried to escape after being dragged from his home was killed. The 63 families of La Unión are planning to return to their lands on 23 August. Amnesty International believes they will face further attacks once they have returned and fears for their safety.

The returned displaced communities of Chocó and the community of San José de Apartadó have frequently been labelled guerilla collaborators by the security

forces and their paramilitary proxies since they live in areas where the left-wing armed opposition group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, maintain a strong presence. Forces of the armed opposition group *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), National Liberation Army, also maintain a strong presence in the Chocó. These accusations have frequently been followed by serious human rights violations committed by the security forces and their paramilitary auxiliaries. Guerrilla forces for their part have frequently accused members of the returned displaced communities of collaborating with the security forces and their paramilitary allies and have refused to respect the communities' demand that they should not be drawn into the conflict. Guerrilla forces have been responsible for death threats and the arbitrary and deliberate killing of members of the Peace Communities they accuse of collaborating with the security forces and their paramilitary allies.

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

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the paramilitary incursion into Bocas de Curbaradó on 2 August, when the gunmen threatened to kill members of the Peace Community of Natividad de María;
- expressing serious concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the Natividad de María and other Peace Communities in Chocó, especially those in the hamlet of Bocas de Curbaradó and families returning to La Unión, urging the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by the communities themselves to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the XVII Brigade and paramilitary groups in the department of Chocó, 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 and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and UN recommendations.

**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 Defence

Dr. Gustavo Bell

Ministerio 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**

**Fax: + 57 1 286 4126 / 281 1213 / 222 1874**

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

Gobernador del Departamento de Chocó

Sr. William Halaby Córdoba

Gobernación del Chocó  
Quibdó, Chocó, COLOMBIA

**Fax: + 57 4 971 1777**

**Salutation: Estimado Sr Gobernador/ Dear Governor**

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental organisation

*Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular* (CINEP)

AA 25916  
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 2 October 2001.