

UA 240/00

Fear for**COLOMBIA Inhabitants of San Francisco de Asis, Natividad de María and Nuestra Señora del Carmen "Peace Communities", Chocó department****Killed: Freddy Gallego, community leader**

Paramilitary gunmen have killed one of the leaders of the "Peace Community" of San Francisco de Asis, in the northwestern department of Chocó. Amnesty International is concerned that the inhabitants of this and other Peace Communities in the region, who have been under continual attack for the past two months, are in grave danger.

Freddy Gallego was taken from his home on 6 August, by heavily armed members of the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá* (ACCU), Self-defence groups of Córdoba and Urabá. His body was found three days later, and it appeared that he had been tortured.

The isolated and dense jungle region of Chocó is a natural stronghold for the guerilla groups who have been in armed conflict with the army and their paramilitary allies for the past 40 years. Freddy Gallego was one of many thousands of people forcibly displaced from the region in 1996, by paramilitaries. He was involved in negotiations with the government that allowed displaced people to return to the region to set up "Peace Communities", in the hope that both sides would recognise their right not to be drawn into the conflict. Death threats forced him to leave the area in 1997, but he continued working from the capital, Bogotá. He had returned to the region earlier this year.

The "Peace Communities" have come under repeated attack from the paramilitaries since they were set up, but the attacks have intensified over the past two months.

On 26 July peasant farmer Antonio Mosquera went to sell his harvest, traveling by boat down the Atrato river from his home in the community of Tamboral, in the Peace Community of Nuestra Señora del Carmen. Paramilitaries held up his boat, stole his harvest and killed him. The whereabouts of his traveling companion are now unknown.

On 16 July José Mosquera went to Riosucio to sell his harvest of corn. Paramilitaries stole the money he had made, and took him away. His body was found two days later in the Atrato river.

On 10 June armed men, reportedly from the ACCU, went into the Buena Vista settlement of the San Francisco "Peace Community". They attacked Jesús Gil and raped his wife, and slit their throats. Nearby they killed Bernardo Roldán: his wife Clementina Guisao and 6 year old son have not been seen since. They also killed Luis Amasta and Heriberto Talaigua.

Some 15 bodies were reportedly found in the Atrato river in the week of 16-24 July. Some of them appeared to have been tortured.

The armed opposition group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, are also responsible for a number of attacks against members of the San Francisco de Asis Peace Community.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The San Francisco de Asís Peace Community was set up in October 1997, by 49 displaced communities who wanted to return to their homes in Chocó department. They were backed by the Diocese of Apartadó and the Colombian non-governmental organization *Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular* (CINEP), Research and Popular Education Centre.

They declared the establishment of the Peace Community after reaching agreements with the government that the security forces would guarantee the security of the areas they would return to. They asked armed groups to respect the boundaries of the communities and not enter them.

Further Peace Communities were set up between December 1998 and February 1999, backed by CINEP and the Parish of Riosucio. Among these are Natividad de María (about 105 families) and Nuestra Señora del Carmen (about 250 families).

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 6 August killing of San Francisco de Asís Peace Community leader Freddy Gallego, and into recent attacks on Peace Communities in the region;
- expressing serious concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the San Francisco de Asís, Natividad de María and Nuestra Señora del Carmen Peace Communities in Chocó, and urging the authorities to take all measures that the communities themselves deem appropriate to guarantee their safety;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and UN recommendations.

Please also raise these concerns with your own government - over the last year delegations from a number of governments have been informed of the situation facing the Peace Communities of Chocó and expressed support for these civilian initiatives, and have travelled to these communities or met with representatives from them. Urge your government to publicly condemn the latest attack and to monitor the efforts of the Colombian government to ensure that this attack is fully investigated, those responsible are brought to justice and action is taken to combat paramilitary groups in the region.

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 Foreign Affairs

Dr. Guillermo Fernández de Soto, Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

Palacio de San Carlos, Calle 10 No 5-51

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 45209 MRRE CO

Fax: +57 1 341 6777/282 5802

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Governor of the Department of Chocó

Juan B Hinestroza
Gobernador del Departamento del Chocó
Gobernación del Chocó
Quibdó, Chocó, Colombia
Fax: +57 4 97 11777
Salutation: Sr. Gobernador/Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental organisation
Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP)
AA 25916
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 25 September 2000.