

UA 259/00

"Disappearances"/Fear for Safety

30 August 2000

COLOMBIA

Rubén USUGA HIGUITA]
 Wilson USUGA HIGUITA] ASFADDES members
 Arvey POSO USUGA]

Angel Quintero, human rights defender
 Other members of the Medellín branch of ASFADDES

The three men named above are believed to have "disappeared" in Medellín, in the department of Antioquia. Angel Quintero reported their "disappearance", and Amnesty International fears that his life is also in danger.

Today is the Latin American Day of the Disappeared.

The three have not been seen since 25 August, when they had arranged to meet up in central Medellín. Wilson Usuga Higueta called his office at 12pm to say that he and Arvey Poso Usuga were going to meet his brother Rubén, and the two men left their home in the city at about 1pm.

There is good reason to believe that they have been abducted. The three had themselves fled to Medellín from their homes in the Urabá region of northern Antioquia, after three of their relatives "disappeared". Two were abducted in Urabá in 1997, apparently by paramilitaries. Witnesses reportedly recognized one of the paramilitaries as an army lieutenant. Another of the men's family was abducted in 1998, by gunmen who claimed to be from the Attorney General's Office (*Fiscalía General de la Nación*), in Magdalena department.

The family denounced all three disappearances to the *Fiscalía* in August 1999. Others who have denounced human rights violations and campaigned for justice have themselves frequently been the target of human rights violations.

Since September 1999, the Usuga Higueta family have been active members of the non-governmental organization *Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos* (ASFADDES), Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared.

A group of men who claimed to be from the *Fiscalía*, but had no search warrant, searched Rubén Usuga's house in Medellín in July 1999. They took away photographs of Rubén and his brothers, and his bank account details.

Wilson and Rubén Usuga's brother-in-law, ASFADDES worker Angel Quintero, denounced their "disappearance" to the authorities. He and other ASFADDES workers in Medellín are believed to be in danger, particularly since members of the organization have received death threats in recent months. (See UA 91/00, AMR 23/24/00, 20 April 2000.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Colombian army and security forces, and their paramilitary allies, commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. In the last five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. The Colombian government made it illegal to set up paramilitary groups, and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989, yet they continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country. Human rights defenders, witnesses and relatives of victims of human rights violations who denounce and campaign for justice are frequently the target of serious human rights violations committed by the security forces and their paramilitary allies.

Guerrilla forces have also committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, including executing those they accuse of collaborating with the security forces or paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Rubén Usuga Higueta, Wilson Usuga Higueta and Arvey Poso Usuga, who are feared to have "disappeared" on 25 August;
- urging full and impartial investigations into their possible "disappearance", for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of Angel Quintero and other ASFADDES workers in Medellín, and urging the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by those at risk to guarantee their safety;
- urging the government to adhere to its obligations regarding human rights defenders, as laid out in the UN *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* adopted on 9 December 1998, the Organization of American States *Human Rights Defenders in the Americas* resolution adopted on 7 June 1999 [AG/RES. 1671 (XXIX-O/99)] and in line with repeated UN recommendations to them to take measures to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders.

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

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogota, Colombia
Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939/284 2186/289 3377
Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr Presidente

Vice-President of the Republic
 Señor Vicepresidente Gustavo Bell Lemus
 Alto Consejero Presidencial para asuntos de Derechos Humanos y lucha Contra la Corrupción
 Cra. 8 #7-26,
 Palacio de Nariño,
 Santafé de Bogotá

Fax: + 57 1 337 1351
Salutation: Dear Vice-President / Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente

Minister of Interior
 Humberto de la Calle
 Ministro del Interior
 Ministerio del Interior
 Palacio Echeverry
 Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.
 Santafé de Bogotá
 COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia
Fax: + 57 1 286 8025
Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Governor of the Department of Antioquia
 Dr. Alberto Builes Ortega, Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia
 Gobernación de Antioquia, Calle 42B, # 52-106, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia
Fax: + 574 381 1342
Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Association for Relatives of the "Disappeared"

Señores
ASFADDES
AA 011446
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 11 October 2000.