

**COLOMBIA Forcibly Displaced Communities of the Cacarica River Basin and other
displaced communities in the department of Chocó**

Amnesty International fears that paramilitary groups intend to attack the forcibly displaced communities living in Chocó department, whom they have accused of manufacturing cocaine and sheltering guerrillas. The communities are preparing to return to their homes in the Cacarica River Basin, an area of military and economic importance which both the army and their paramilitary allies and the armed opposition want to control.

An open letter signed by an umbrella group of paramilitary forces, the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, dated 31 October 1999, alleges that there are cocaine processing plants near where the communities are living in Chocó, and claims this is proved by the seizure of "*insumos para el procesamiento de alcaloides en una de las embarcaciones que suministra ayuda humanitaria a estas comunidades*", "a cargo of chemicals for the processing of alkaloids on one of the boats supplying the communities with humanitarian aid".

The boat in question was raided between 20 and 21 October, reportedly in the Cacarica area. The commander of the *Batallón Fluvial 50 de la Armada*, Riverine Battalion No 50 of the Colombian Navy, is reported to have suggested to the media that the aid supplies and the chemicals were intended for members of the communities of the Cacarica River Basin. The *Red de Solidaridad*, Solidarity Network, a government relief agency, has apparently denied this.

The letter, reportedly sent to a priest working for the Diocese of Apartadó, which covers areas of Antioquia and Chocó departments, also accused displaced communities of inviting Colombian and foreign journalists to the department of Chocó to speak to "*elementos de la guerrilla que se indentifican como campesinos*", "guerrilla members who identify themselves as peasant farmers".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The communities of the Cacarica River Basin, forcibly displaced in a joint paramilitary-military offensive in February 1997, were among many forcibly displaced from their lands in Urabá by massacres committed by army-backed paramilitary groups and guerrilla organizations in 1996 and 1997. Some of them sought refuge in the municipality of Turbo, department of Antioquia. Others sought refuge in Panamá before being repatriated to Bahía Cupica, municipality of Bahía Solano, department of Chocó.

The communities have gradually returned to the areas in which they lived and set up "Peace Communities" to try to persuade the warring factions to respect their neutrality in the conflict and their right to life. Since then, many community members have "disappeared", been extrajudicially executed, or threatened with death, mainly by army-backed paramilitary groups, but also by members of the Colombian army and the guerrilla group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. Paramilitaries attacked the Peace Community of San Francisco de Asís in April 1999, and there have been persistent rumours in the region of further paramilitary attacks (see UA 70/99, AMR 23/30/99, 8 April 1999, and follow-ups). Guerrilla groups have also recently killed several members of the San Francisco de Asís community.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the displaced communities of the Cacarica River Basin, particularly as they prepare to return to their homes, and for the safety of other displaced communities in the department of Chocó;
- calling on the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by the communities themselves to guarantee their safety;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and United Nations 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

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/ 284 2186/ 337 1351

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Commander of the Riverine Battalion No 50 of the Colombian Navy

Colonel Nicolás Montenegro

Batallón Fluvial No.50 de la Armada

Avenida de La Playa, Turbo, Antioquia, Colombia.

Telegrams: Coronel Montenegro

Faxes: + 57 4 827 2476

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Comandante / Dear Commander

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz

AA 31861

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 20 December 1999.