

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 169/99 Possible "Disappearance" / Fear for Safety 29 November 1999

COLOMBIA Edgar QUIROGA leader of a peasant farming community
Gildardo FUENTES, peasant farmer.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Edgar Quiroga and Gildardo Fuentes who have been abducted by paramilitaries and whose whereabouts are now not known.

The men were reportedly first detained by the army (*Batallón No.45 Héroes de Majagual*, No 45 Battalion Majagual Heroes), in the Caño Azul area of the municipality of San Pablo, department of Bolívar in the morning of 28 November 1999. They were then, according to witnesses, handed over to the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), United Self-defence Groups of Colombia, a paramilitary organization operating in the area. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Edgar Quiroga was seen alive later that night in the custody of paramilitary forces. The Colombian Army denies detaining the men.

Edgar Quiroga and Gildardo Fuentes had returned from the capital Bogotá the day before. There they had met with state and government officials to denounce the serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law taking place in the department of Bolívar. This had included the forced displacement, in October, of thousands of peasant farmers as a result of paramilitary attacks. Edgar Quiroga had also reportedly met with representatives of the United Nations Human Rights Office and the German and Canadian Embassies. Gildardo Fuentes had used the visit to denounce to the judicial authorities his abduction by paramilitaries on 8 October which had occurred at a paramilitary checkpoint just metres away from an army road checkpoint where he had just been stopped and searched. He was apparently forced into a paramilitary vehicle which was then able to drive unimpeded through the army checkpoint.

Edgar Quiroga, leader of a peasant farming community, had been involved last year in negotiations with the government on behalf of displaced peasant farming communities from the department of Bolívar and neighbouring areas. This had led to a signed agreement by the government that it would guarantee their safety and take action to combat the paramilitary groups responsible for their displacement. The government, however, has failed to take any effective action and several of the representatives of the communities have reportedly since been killed or threatened by paramilitary forces in the region. Edgar Quiroga and other leaders had called on the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States to take measures to guarantee their safety.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Over the past five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. The Colombian government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations 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.

Guerrilla forces have also committed serious violations of international humanitarian law including executing those they accuse of being security force or paramilitary force collaborators.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of peasant farmer leaders Gildardo Fuentes and Edgar Quiroga, who were reportedly detained by the Majagual Heroes Battalion on 28 November 1999 and then handed over to paramilitary forces in the municipality of San Pablo;
- calling on the authorities to open an immediate and comprehensive investigation into their "disappearance" in order to establish their whereabouts and bring to justice those responsible;
- urging that the results of the investigation be made public;
- expressing concern for the safety of other leaders of peasant farming communities in the department of Bolívar;
- asking that all measures deemed appropriate by those under threat are taken to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups in the department of Bolívar, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice;
- asking the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO (please note that fax machines are sometimes turned off. It is better to try during office hours local time -5 hours GMT):

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

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Néstor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministerio Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5584 / 342 3201 / 341 9739

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Commander of the V Brigade

General Martín Orlando Carreño Sandoval

Comandante de la V Brigada
Carrera 33-14, Barrio Los Pinos
Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia
Faxes: + 57 7 645 5051/635 1493
Salutation: Sr. General / Dear General

COPIES TO:

Alternative Legal Association
MINGA, AA 40303, 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 27 December 1999.