

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

15 May 1998

COLOMBIA

Residents of the village of Paratebueno

A paramilitary group, *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), Colombian United Self-defence Forces, has reportedly announced its intention to attack the village of Paratebueno in the municipality of Medina, department of Cundinamarca, and to kill many of the residents.

Although Paratebueno is named in a report by the *Defensor del Pueblo*, People's Ombudsman, which calls on the authorities to protect communities which have been explicitly threatened with attack by paramilitary groups, no steps have been taken to protect the villagers.

On 4 May 1998 at least 18 residents of Puerto Alvira village, municipality of Mapiripán, in the neighbouring Meta Department, were murdered by members of a paramilitary force (see UA 144/98, AMR 23/27/98, 6 May 1998). The *Defensor del Pueblo* had informed the Colombian government in February 1998 that the village was likely to be attacked by paramilitary forces and urged that appropriate steps be taken to prevent such an attack. The authorities took no action to protect the community.

In early 1997, widespread reports of an impending attack on the town of Mapiripán, capital of municipality of Mapiripán, were also ignored. In July 1997 a paramilitary force sealed off the town for three days and killed at least 30 residents (See UA 228/97, AMR 23/50/97, 22 July 1997).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peasant communities in disputed zones in Colombia's long running civil conflict have frequently suffered attacks. Neither the left wing armed opposition groups nor the armed forces and their paramilitary allies recognize the civilian population's neutrality in the conflict.

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Over the past five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. 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.

President Ernesto Samper Pizano has repeatedly promised to improve the human rights situation and to dismantle paramilitary forces, but no steps have been taken to control their actions and to hold members accountable for serious and widespread human rights violations. The Attorney General recently stated that over 200 outstanding arrest warrants issued against alleged paramilitary members have still not been acted upon by the security forces.

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

- expressing deep concern for the safety of residents of Paratebueno village, Cundinamarca Department, in light of the planned attack by paramilitary forces;
- calling for all appropriate measures to be taken to guarantee the safety of the community;

- calling on the government to act on the *Defensor del Pueblo's* report and take adequate steps to protect all the communities mentioned in the report as facing a serious risk of attack by paramilitary forces;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the area and urging that those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Tx: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 286 7434

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Alfonso López Caballero, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Fax: + 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gilberto Echeverri Mejía, 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:

Human Rights Organization

Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (CPDH)
AA 12817 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Advocate for the People (Ombudsman):

Dr. José Fernando Castro Caycedo, Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo
Calle 55 No.10-32, 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 26 June 1998.