

UA 154/98 Fear for safety

18 May 1998

COLOMBIA Peasant farmer families forcibly expelled from Bellacruz Ranch and human rights workers assisting them

On 13 May 1998, a heavily armed paramilitary organization made death threats against a community of 70 displaced peasant families living on La Miel Ranch, Tolima Department. The families had been driven off Bellacruz Ranch, Cesar Department, in 1996 by paramilitary forces operating with the support of the security forces.

The paramilitaries accused the community of being guerrilla collaborators, falsely claiming that European Union funds received for reconstruction projects were being supplied by guerrillas. Those accused of being guerrilla sympathizers or collaborators by the armed forces or their paramilitary allies frequently become victims of death threats and killings.

Telephone death threats were made to the families a week before the paramilitary incursion. Human rights organizations working on the families' behalf in Tolima Department have also received threats.

There is serious concern that the threats and accusations made against the displaced community on the La Miel Ranch, and those seeking to assist them, may be the prelude to a large-scale paramilitary attack on the community and its supporters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Between February and March 1996, 287 peasant farmer families were forcibly evicted from the lands they had been occupying on the Bellacruz Ranch by paramilitary forces operating with the support of the security forces. Since their eviction, at least 30 people have been "disappeared" or killed by the paramilitaries (see UA 74/96, AMR 23/17/96, 7 February 1997 & follow ups).

In December 1997, President Samper announced action against paramilitary groups responsible for widespread human rights violations in many areas of the country. To date, little action has been taken. This failure to take effective action against paramilitary groups and those in the armed forces who support them has allowed death threats and human rights violations against forcibly displaced families to continue with impunity.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of peasant farmer families forcibly displaced from the Bellacruz Ranch now living in Tolima Department, and for those trying to assist them, in the light of death threats made against them by paramilitary groups;
- calling for immediate measures to protect the lives of the displaced peasant farmers and their representatives, who remain under threat because of their links with the Bellacruz case;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into these threats and other human rights violations linked to the case, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice.
- urging the government to immediately fulfil its commitment to disband paramilitary forces presently operating as auxiliaries of the armed forces or with armed forces' complicity. Members of such forces responsible for human rights violations should be brought to justice.

Human rights violations against families forcibly displaced from the Bellacruz Ranch have been brought to the attention of several governments. It would be helpful to express your concern at the events related above, to your own government, urging it to use its good offices to urge in turn that the Colombian authorities take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the displaced families, to ensure that immediate action is taken to dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the region, and to bring those responsible for human rights violations to justice.

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 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

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez, Fiscal General de la Nación
Fiscalía General de la Nación, Apartado Aéreo 29855
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2000 (when ansaphone picks up dial 2017 for fax)

Salutation: Estimado Dr./Dear Dr.

COPIES TO:

Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos - Unidad y Reconstrucción (ANUC-UR)
Apartado aéreo 18534, 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 29 June 1998.