

COLOMBIA Residents of Cazucá, municipality of Soacha

There is serious concern for the safety of residents of Cazucá district, municipality of Soacha, on the outskirts of Santafé de Bogotá, after a poster was recently placed in several public places announcing the formation of a new paramilitary group in the area.

The poster announces that *"Due to the huge wave of insecurity, chaos and irreverence shaking our community, a group has been organized to keep watch over the security of the neighbouring areas, which will act in benefit of the people. Its modus operandi: it will work to eliminate certain outbreaks of subversion that have been affecting the area."* The pamphlet continues: *"Youngster, fulfil your duties as a citizen and behave yourself. Do not assemble late at night. You will regret it."*

The poster, together with the many cases of human rights abuses recently committed by paramilitary groups in Soacha (see below), raises fears for the security of the inhabitants of the area. In the past, paramilitary groups linked to the security forces have killed many young people in poor neighbourhoods who happened to be out on the streets during the evening hours, accusing them of being delinquents or subversives.

As a result of intimidation by the paramilitary, several families have reportedly left the area. The inhabitants have been told not to complain about things like, for example, public services, or face reprisals "of a military nature".

Denunciations made to the *Fiscalía General de la Nación*, Attorney General's Office, the Office of the Governor of Cundinamarca, the Office of the Mayor of Soacha and the Town Council of Soacha - both about the threats and about specific human rights violations - have to date not resulted in any apparent attempt by the authorities to dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the municipality or detain those responsible for human rights violations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Paramilitary groups have reportedly been operating since 1990 in Soacha with the cooperation of the military forces. Allegedly, one of the paramilitary leaders offered military instruction to young people in the area from 1990 until 1995.

The population of Soacha and neighbouring areas has been continuously terrorised since the appearance of the paramilitary groups. In one of the more recent cases, on April 1996, paramilitary forces burnt several houses, stole property and killed several young people, among them Norbei Quintero. On 24 August 1996, they reportedly killed youngsters in areas of the town being patrolled at the same time by the army, who according to the residents were "said to be clearing the area for what was to come".

On 24 August, a paramilitary group entered a shop in Villa Mercedes, shouted abuse at some costumers drinking beer and, when challenged, shot Emilio Quintero Tovar. His son, who tried to intervene, was also shot. Reportedly, when the paramilitary members realized that Emilio Quintero Tovar was not dead, they beat him to death with a truncheon.

The paramilitary then went to another shop, where they shot dead Raúl Gómez Mayorca and José Luis Agudelo Arango. During the confusion, there appears to have been some cross-fire and casualties among the paramilitary themselves.

Alfredo Alba, reported to be a member of the paramilitary group was shot dead. Unconfirmed reports place at 12 the total number of deaths. The killings, threats and other attacks have continued, but the local population are often too afraid to report cases.

Paramilitary groups, declared illegal in 1989, continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of Colombia, despite government pledges to protect human rights and dismantle such groups. Members of the security forces, together with their paramilitary allies, continue to commit serious violations with virtual impunity.

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

- expressing deep concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the municipality of Soacha in light of the recent paramilitary announcement;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the reported threats, abuses and killings, and the apparent lack of response by the armed and security forces to prevent or stop those violent attacks on the community;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the allegations of involvement by the military forces in the formation and operation of paramilitary groups;
- urging the government to fulfil its commitment to disband paramilitary forces, and asking for any civilians or members of the military involved in paramilitary activities to be brought 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

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 286 7434 / 287 7939 / 289 3377

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Calle 35 No. 4-31
 Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 287 0939 or 288 2828

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe
 Ministro del Interior

Ministerio del Interior
Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA
Telegrams: Ministro del Interior Serpa, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes:45406 MINGO CO
Fax:+ 57 1 281 5884/286 0053
Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

SEMBRAR (Corporación de Servicios Profesionales y Comunitarios)
Apartado Aéreo 34692, 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 31 December 1996.