

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 23/16/95
Distr: UA/SC

UA 102/95 Possible Extrajudicial Executions / Fear for Safety 27 April 1995

COLOMBIA Pedro Pablo Vera Porras, aged 32
 Leonidas Tapiero Maken, aged 33
 José Aldemar Delgado Castillo, aged 44
 Celestino Benavides, aged 46
 María del Carmen Quiñones Prince (f), aged 42

Repeated attacks by paramilitary forces have greatly heightened fears for the safety of civilians in the municipality of San Alberto, department of Cesar.

Reports indicate that during April 1995, 19 people have been killed in the region of San Alberto, including the five named above.

The most recent multiple killing occurred on 22 April on the farm Tokio, in the area of Los Tenidos, La Llana, municipality of San Alberto. According to reports, a group of approximately 15 heavily armed men broke up a meeting of some 40 smallhold farmers and labourers. Eyewitnesses allege that the men were dressed in combat uniforms usually worn by members of the armed forces. They also wore red armbands marked with the initials A.C.C., *Autodefensas Campesinas de Colombia*, Peasant Farmer Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, a well-known paramilitary group active in the region.

The gunmen used a list of names to segregate Pedro Pablo Vera Porras, Leonidas Tapiero Maken, José Aldemar Delgado Castillo, Celestino Benavides and María del Carmen Quiñones Prince from the other participants of the meeting. The five civilians were then taken away by the gunmen to an unknown location. Their bodies were discovered later the same day.

This is not the first multiple killing in the area. According to information received by Amnesty International, seven civilians were killed on 3 April 1995, including a 15-year-old girl.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite repeated government pledges to protect human rights, members of the Colombian and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Many paramilitary groups have their origins in the civilian "self-defence" squads which the army created in the 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombian armed forces to combat and disband such groups, paramilitary forces continue to work with the support of the security forces and have killed and "disappeared" perceived opponents in many areas of the country. Illegal paramilitary activity is principally centred on rural areas of guerrilla influence, but "hit squads" - small groups of gunmen - have frequently been despatched to cities to assassinate popular leaders, left-wing political activists, trade union leaders, human rights activists and national political leaders. President Ernesto Samper Pizano has made repeated promises, both during his election campaign and since taking office in August 1994, to improve the human rights situation. His promises include a commitment to dismantle paramilitary forces.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail

letters either in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilians in the municipality of San Alberto, department of Cesar, and calling for immediate measures to guarantee their safety;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the possible extrajudicial executions by members of the paramilitary group Peasant Farmer Self-Defence Groups of Colombia of Pedro Pablo Vera Porras, Leonidas Tapiero Maken, José Aldemar Delgado Castillo, Celestino Benavides and María del Carmen Quiñones Prince on 22 April 1995, and calling for the results to be made public and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice;
- urging the government to immediately disband paramilitary forces presently operating as auxiliaries of the armed forces or with armed forces' complicity, and for members of such forces responsible for human rights violations to be brought to justice; calling for links between these forces and the security forces to be investigated.

APPEALS TO1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

2) Minister of Defence

Dr. Fernando Botero Zea
 Ministro de Defensa Nacional
 Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
 Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Ministro de Defensa Botero, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes:42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes:+ 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

3) Minister of the Interior

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe
 Ministro de Gobierno
 Ministerio de Gobierno
 Carrera 8a, No.8-09, Piso 7
 Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro de Gobierno Serpa, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Asociación par la Promoción Social Alternativa
 Señores
 MINGA
 Calle 19 No. 4-88 Of.14-02
 A.A. 40303

Santafé de Bogota D.C.
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 10 June 1995.