

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 120/94 Fear for Safety

25 March 1994

**COLOMBIA Displaced People in Barrancabermeja Refuge, Santander department**

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of displaced people living in the *Albergue Campesino* (Peasant Farmer's Refuge) in Barrancabermeja after soldiers from a local military base made threats against them.

Reports state that at 12.15am on 20 March 1994, members of the *V Brigada* (V Brigade) of the Colombian Army stationed at the Pozo Siete base in Barrancabermeja arrived at the Refuge. They battered on doors and windows demanding to be let in, but were refused entry by the refuge coordinator as they did not have a judicial entry warrant. The soldiers threatened and insulted the coordinator, assuring her that they would return with a warrant, and that when they got in they would "*reduce [the Refuge] to nothing*" ("*volverían nada [el Albergue]*"). A soldier fired his weapon into the Refuge, but no one was hit.

The Albergue is a refuge centre set up by church bodies and non-governmental organizations to offer temporary shelter to people forced by political violence to flee their homes. It has faced threats before, and was forced to close for over a year in June 1992, after a series of threats and attacks by army and paramilitary forces. The history of threats and attacks against the refuge heightens Amnesty International's current concern for the safety of the people living there.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In recent years widespread and systematic human rights violations have occurred in Colombia, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", torture and arbitrary arrest. President César Gaviria Trujillo has repeatedly pledged his government's commitment to protect human rights. However, members of the Colombian armed and security forces continue to commit serious violations with virtual impunity. There are an estimated 300,000 displaced people in Colombia who have been forced to flee the conflict between guerrillas and the army. Army counter-insurgency operations in rural areas are characterized by the intimidation, extrajudicial executions, "disappearances and torture of unarmed civilians many of whom are peasant farmers. Many people are forced to flee rural areas as a result and find shelter in the cities. In urban areas displaced people are often treated with suspicion by the authorities and accused of being guerrillas.

**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 people housed in the Albergue in Barrancabermeja, in the light of the reported threats made against them by soldiers from the V Brigade on 20 March 1994;
- urging that concrete measures be taken to ensure the protection of all the residents in the Albergue;
- urging that there be an immediate and thorough enquiry into the soldiers' actions, that the results be made public and that those found responsible should be brought to justice;
- urging, that whilst investigations are underway, any armed forces personnel implicated in the incident should be suspended from active duty;

- urging that the authorities should take steps to ensure respect for the fundamental human rights of people who have been internally displaced by the conflict in Colombia.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) **President of Colombia:**

Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo  
 Presidente de la República  
 Palacio de Nariño  
 Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia  
 Telegrams: President Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telexes: 44281 PALP CO**  
**Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939**  
**Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Gaviria**

2) **Procurator General:**

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta Padilla  
 Procurador General de la Nación  
 Procuraduría General  
 Edificio Banco Ganadero  
 Carrera 5, No. 15-80  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta, Bogotá, Colombia**  
**Faxes:+ 57 1 342 9723**  
**Salutation:Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Arrieta**

3) **Minister of Defence**

Dr. Rafael Pardo Rueda  
 Ministro de Defensa Nacional  
 Ministerio de Defensa Nacional  
 Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telegrams:Ministro de Defensa Pardo Rueda, Bogota, Colombia**  
**Telexes:42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO**  
**Faxes:+ 57 1 222 1874**  
**Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister**

4) **Advocate for the People:**

Dr. Jaime Córdoba Triviño  
 Defensor del Pueblo  
 Defensoría del Pueblo  
 Calle 35, No.7-25, P.5  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telegrams:Defensor del Pueblo Trivino, Defensoria del PuebloBogota, Colombia**  
**Faxes:+ 57 1 288 6683**  
**Salutation: Estimado Dr Triviño/Dear Dr. Triviño**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEAL TO:**

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace  
 Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz  
 AA 31.861  
 Santa Fé de Bogotá  
 Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia in your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 May 1994.