

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety/Possible "Disappearances" 24 January 2000

COLOMBIA

Ruben BAYENA
Adinael BAYENA
Yamile RIOS
Juan RIOS
civilian population of El Tarra, department of Norte de Santander

Killed: Ramón PACHECO CARRASCAL, Aimer ORTEGA SALCEDO, Dario ROLÓN

Paramilitary forces have reportedly killed five peasant farmers and abducted four others in the municipality of El Tarra, department of Norte de Santander. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety of the four, and other civilians in the area.

On 19 January 2000 a paramilitary force was apparently confronted by guerrillas when it went into the community of Mineiro. As they retreated the paramilitaries used six members of a family, including three children, as human shields. The children and one adult were later released, but peasant farmers Ruben and Adinael Bayena are believed to be held by the paramilitaries at their base in Lajas, another community in El Tarra.

The next day paramilitaries apparently returned to Mineiro and killed Ramón Pacheco Carrascal, Aimer Ortega Salcedo and Dario Roló. They also abducted Juan Ríos and Yamile Ríos, whose whereabouts are now unknown.

These are the latest in a series of abductions and killings by paramilitaries, who launched an offensive in the region on 29 May 1999. Since December 1999 they have renewed threats to kill people they accuse of being guerrilla collaborators from Mineiro and other communities in El Tarra, including Martillo Bajo, Isla del Cedro, Filo Gringo, Filo de la Virgen and Puerto Las Palmas. Since these attacks at least 200 peasant farmers from the Mineiro area have sought refuge in Filo Gringo.

These attacks took place despite a very strong army presence in El Tarra, where a paramilitary base in Lajas has reportedly operated unhindered since 24 December. In the community of Miramontes, in the neighbouring municipality of Tibú, soldiers from the army battalion "*Héroes de Saraguro*" have reportedly been seen swapping their military insignia for armbands bearing the initials of the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia.

On 30 August, the government relieved three high ranking officials in the region of their posts for failing to take action against the paramilitary groups. One of them, General Bravo Silva of the army's 5th Brigade, criticized the government's action against the military, and was dismissed for insubordination. Amnesty International welcomes this action by the government, but remains concerned that it is still failing to act on its commitment to dismantle paramilitary groups.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian population of the municipality of El Tarra, Norte de Santander department, and urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern for the safety of peasant farmers Ruben and Adinael Bayena, and Juan and Yamile Ríos, who were abducted by paramilitaries on 19 and 20 January 2000;
- calling on the authorities to open an immediate and comprehensive investigation to establish their whereabouts and bring those responsible to justice, with the results made public;

- calling for full and impartial investigations into the killings of José Edilberto Gutiérrez Sánchez, Omar Bayena Barrientos, Ramón Pacheco Carrascal, Aimer Ortega Salcedo and Dario Colón, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- expressing concern at the failure of the government and armed forces to take steps to protect the civilian population of El Tarra, despite repeated warnings of an impending paramilitary attack in the area;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups in the department of Norte de Santander, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

APPEALS TO:President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/ 284 2186/ 337 1351

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Néstor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministerio Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5584 / 342 3201 / 341 9739

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Commander of the 5th Brigade

General Martín Orlando Carreño Sandoval
Comandante de la V Brigada
Calle 14, Carrera 33
Bucaramanga
Santander

Telegrams: Comandante, Quinta Brigada, Santander, Colombia.

Faxes: + 57 76 455051 / 76 351493

Salutation: Sr. Comandante / Dear Commander

COPIES TO:Alternative Legal Association

MINGA, AA 40303, 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 6 March 2000.