

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats

11 February 1991

COLOMBIA: Hernando PINTO

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Hernando Pinto, a peasant leader in El Carmen, department of Santander, who has reportedly been threatened by members of the Colombian army.

On 3 February 1991 the army carried out a census of the inhabitants of El Carmen, in the municipality of San Vicente de Chucurí, department of Santander. Some 800 peasants responded to the army's summons to attend a meeting, in which the commander of the military base of El Carmen reportedly instructed the peasants to support paramilitary groups active in the region.

This meeting was also attended by members of peasant, human rights and other popular organizations from the region of Magdalena Medio. Immediately after the meeting a Lieutenant from El Carmen military base, under the Luciano de Luyar Battalion, is reported to have threatened Hernando Pinto, a peasant leader, and accused him of inciting insurrection among the peasant communities (sublevar a las veredas).

According to reports known members of the paramilitary group Muerte a Secuestradores (MAS), Death to Kidnappers, had appeared in the region shortly before the census was conducted and had participated in the meeting called by the army.

Hernando Pinto had previously received death threats by members of the army's Brigada Móvil, Mobile Brigade, in November 1990, during an army incursion in a number of peasant communities, including El Carmen, in which numerous homes were searched and Hernando Pinto's pregnant wife, was reportedly detained and ill-treated.

The Procurator General's Office is investigating paramilitary, including MAS, activities in the region following the testimony of a non-commissioned officer (suboficial) of the police, who revealed an armed forces' plan to use paramilitary forces to assassinate various local leaders from El Carmen.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1981 the MAS claimed its first victims, among them scores of left-wing students, teachers, lawyers, trade unionists and community leaders. The military claimed MAS was created by the criminal underworld in order to combat guerrilla groups; however, in 1982 the Procurator General ordered an investigation into MAS, producing evidence that 59 serving members of the armed forces had been actively involved in incidents attributed to the "death squad".

All were acquitted after their cases were handed over to the military courts.

The MAS has continued to act with impunity since that investigation and has allegedly been responsible for numerous human rights violations.

In areas where guerrilla forces are active in the Magdalena Medio region the local civilian population is often perceived by the armed forces as potential guerrilla collaborators and has, as a result, been subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution by army personnel and paramilitary forces.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern for the safety of Hernando Pinto and others from El Carmen, following the receipt of death threats;
- asking that an immediate investigation be conducted into the threats in order to bring those responsible to justice;
- urging that all the necessary steps be taken to ensure their safety.

APPEALS TO:

Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Presidente Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia

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Capitán Gilberto Ibarra Mendoza
Comandante
Base Militar del Carmen
Santander
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Telegrams: Comandante Militar El Carmen, Santander, Colombia

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Batallón Luciano D'Eluyar
San Vicente de Chucurí
Santander
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Telegrams: Comandante Batallon Luciano D'Eluyar, San Vicente, Santander, Colombia

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta
Procurador General de la Nación
Edificio Banco Ganadero
Carrera 5, No. 15-80
Bogotá, Colombia

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Telexes: 41224 PRGEN CO or 41213 PGNDP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 0472

COPIES TO:

Comisión Intercongresional de Justicia y Paz
AA 52332
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 25 March 1991.