

PUBLIC

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Fear for

"Disappearance"

COLOMBIA10 members of peasant farmer families, including six children, from Chengue, Sucre department

Fear for safety: civilian population of Chengue

Army-backed paramilitaries have abducted 10 people, six of them children, after attacking a village in the north-western department of Sucre, in the early hours of 17 January. They killed 25 villagers picked out from a death list.

More than 100 armed men from the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia, attacked the hamlet of Chengue, in the municipality of Ovejas. They picked out 25 people from a list and hacked them to death with machetes, or shot them. Before they left, the paramilitaries set fire to the hamlet and reportedly seized 10 of the villagers, six of them children, whose whereabouts remain unknown.

Humanitarian organisations trying to get into the area to help survivors were reportedly turned back by troops of the *Primera Brigada de Infantería de la Marina*, First Marine Infantry Unit.

Some 600 people from Chengue and nearby hamlets have now fled to the town of Ovejas and neighboring municipalities.

The people of Chengue and two nearby hamlets had written to President Andrés Pastrana in October 2000 to plead for protection, after rumours of an imminent paramilitary attack. Some of those who were singled out and killed during this attack are believed to have signed this letter.

The authorities did nothing to protect the villagers, and have taken no decisive action to confront or dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area, or to bring military personnel who work with paramilitary forces to justice, despite numerous reports of paramilitary activity in the area in recent months.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. In the last five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. So far this year the United Nations Human Rights Office in Colombia has received information of 26 massacres committed in 11 departments, in which more than 170 people have been killed, mostly by paramilitary groups. In February 2000, 200 paramilitary gunmen raided the village of El Salado, in nearby Bolívar department, killing 36 people, including a six-year-old child. Many victims were tied to a table in the village sports field and subjected to torture, including rape, before they were stabbed or shot dead. A Marine Infantry unit reportedly set up a roadblock on the road to the village, preventing humanitarian organizations from getting through.

The Colombian government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989, yet they continue to work with the support of the security forces - by action or omission - in many areas of the country.

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

- calling for full and impartial investigations into the abduction and "disappearance" of 10 peasant farmers, including six children, by army backed paramilitaries. in the municipality of Ovejas, department of Sucre;
- urging the government to take all necessary measures to establish their whereabouts and secure their release unharmed;
- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian populations of Chengue and nearby hamlets who have fled to the municipal capital, Ovejas, and to neighboring municipalities;
- urging the authorities to do everything necessary to guarantee the safety of the civilian population in this region;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the municipality of Ovejas, department of Sucre, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

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 1 336 2109 / 565 8566

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Vice-President of the Republic

Señor Vicepresidente Gustavo Bell Lemus

Alto Consejero Presidencial para asuntos de Derechos Humanos y lucha Contra la Corrupción

Cra. 8 #7-26, Palacio de Nariño,

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 337 1350 / 337 1351

Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente / Dear Vice-President

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 1 221 9088

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Governor of Sucre

Sr. Salvador Arana Sus

Gobernación de Sucre, Calle 21, No.22-10, Of.203

Sincelejo, Sucre, Colombia

Salutation: Dear Governor / Sr. Gobernador

COPIES TO:

National Advocate for the People

Sr. Defensor del Pueblo
Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz
Defensoría del Pueblo
Calle 55, N°10-32/46
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Non-governmental organisation
Comision Colombiana de Juristas
Carrera 10, N°24-76, Of.1120
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 2 March 2001.