

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 68/95 Death Threats / Fear for Safety

16 March 1995

COLOMBIA Civic Human Rights Committee of Meta

On 15 March 1995, a death threat was received by the Civic Human Rights Committee of Meta (a department of Colombia), *Comité Cívico de Derechos Humanos del Meta*, based in the departmental capital, Villavicencio. Harassment and intimidation of members of the Committee has escalated in recent weeks and there is serious concern for their safety.

The threat, received on 15 March, was in the form of a message left on the Committee's answerphone, saying: "You swine: I am going to kill you all. I'm going to bomb ...(words unintelligible). I am going to destroy you, you dirty swine." [*"Hola perros: les voy a matar todos. Les voy a poner una bomba (...no entendible). Les voy a quebrar, malditos perros".*]

The Committee works with other local non-government organizations to assist families who have been displaced from their homes and villages as a result of armed conflict in the region, and to denounce human rights violations committed by the armed forces and their paramilitary allies.

In recent months, there has been an upsurge in military and paramilitary activity in the Ariari region, south of Villavicencio, where there is a strong guerrilla presence. Civilians living in areas where guerrilla forces are active are often perceived by the armed forces as potential guerrilla collaborators and have, as a result, been subjected to serious human rights violations, such as extrajudicial execution and "disappearance", by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. The paramilitary group known as "Black Snake", [*"Serpiente Negra"*] has openly threatened inhabitants of the town of Medellín de Ariari with annihilation. As a result, there has been an increase in civilians arriving in Villavicencio from that area. In recent days direct threats and intimidation of members of the Committee and others working with the displaced families have increased to such a degree that there is very serious concern for their safety.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite repeated government pledges to protect human rights, members of the Colombian security forces, together with 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 throughout the country. 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 have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents with impunity. In many areas of the country paramilitary forces continued to work with the support of the security forces.

President Ernesto Samper Pizano, who assumed office on 7 August 1994, has made repeated promises, both during his election campaign and since taking office,

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 at intimidation and death threats against the Meta Civic Human Rights Committee, in particular the death threat received 15 March; urging that there be an immediate and thorough investigation into this and previous threats and the results made public;
- urging that, in line with President Samper's declared commitment to protecting the lives of human rights workers, all possible measures be taken to protect those working with the Committee;
- urging the government to immediately fulfil its commitment to disband paramilitary forces presently operating as auxiliaries of, or with the complicity of, the armed forces;
- calling for members of such forces responsible for human rights violations to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

1) President

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 7434/287 7939

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper

2) Procurator General

Dr. Orlando Vásquez Velásquez
 Procurador General de la Nación
 Procuraduría General
 Edificio Banco Ganadero
 Carrera 5, No. 15-80
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General Vasquez, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 342 9723/281 7531

Salutation: Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Vásquez

3) Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá
 Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 245 5292 or 288 2828

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso

4) Advocate for the People

Dr. Jaime Córdoba Triviño

Defensor del Pueblo
Defensoría del Pueblo
Calle 35 No. 7-25 piso 5
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
**Telegrams: Defensor del Pueblo Triviño, Defensoria del
Pueblo, Bogota, Colombia**
Faxes: + 57 1 346 1225/285 6908
Salutation: Estimado Dr Triviño/Dear Dr. Triviño

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

La Comisión Intercongresional de Justicia y Paz,
AA 31861
Sante Fé 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 27 April 1995.