

UA 30/02

Fear for**COLOMBIA**Johanna Vargas Bustos (f), aged 16

Soldiers reportedly detained 16-year-old Johana Vargas Bustos on 18 January at a checkpoint in El Castillo municipality, in Meta department. She has not been seen since. Amnesty International fears she may have "disappeared", and is seriously concerned for her safety.

The checkpoint, in the Aguas Zarcas area near the town of Dorado, was reportedly run by soldiers of the Alban Battalion, VII brigade. They reportedly forced Johana Vargas Bustos and a young man off a bus at 11.45am.

The soldiers reportedly lifted the checkpoint at 4pm, and set free everyone they had detained. Subsequently unidentified gunmen forced Johana and the young man into a car which drove off in the direction of the neighbouring municipality of Cubarral. They both apparently tried to escape, but only the young man got away.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Alban Battalion is carrying out counter-insurgency operations against armed opposition groups in Meta department, who are fighting for control of the area.

During one of these operations, on 11 January, the battalion reportedly entered a village in El Castillo municipality, and accused the inhabitants of being guerrilla collaborators. In recent weeks army-backed paramilitaries have reportedly stopped food-deliveries into the municipality of El Castillo and accused drivers of delivering to the guerrillas. In the past those accused of collaborating with guerrilla groups by the security forces and their paramilitary allies have frequently been victim of serious human rights violations by these forces.

Paramilitary groups are reportedly maintaining a permanent blockade over deliveries to El Castillo municipality, levying taxes on those deliveries that they let through. Paramilitary groups are able to operate despite the fact that the VII Brigade has control of the area. Guerrilla forces are known to have killed people they consider to be collaborating with their enemies.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish, English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Johana Vargas Bustos, who has not been seen since she was detained at a checkpoint in El Castillo municipality, Meta department, run the by Alban Battalion of the VII Brigade, on 18 January, and urging the authorities to do everything necessary to find out where she is;
- urging the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into her "disappearance", to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Meta, and for members of the security forces responsible for cooperating and operating in unison with these groups to be brought to justice;
- calling for decisive action to combat and dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated UN recommendations and government commitments.

APPEALS TO:

Commander of the VII Brigade
Comandante de la VII Brigada

Coronel Francisco Pedraza Peláez
Calle 37 No. 33B-33
Villavicencio, Meta, COLOMBIA

Salutation: Dear Colonel Pedraza Peláez / Sr. Coronel Pedraza Peláez

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Apartado Aéreo 29855, Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite),
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Fiscal General, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2000

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

National Advocate for the people

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,
Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,
Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301,
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegram: National Advocate, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 640 0491 **Salutation: Dear Mr. Cifuentes Muñoz / Estimado Sr. Cifuentes Muñoz**

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

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 566 20 71

Salutation: Dear President Pastrana / Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente Pastrana

COPIES TO:

The Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared
ASFADDES - Nacional
Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos
AA 011446
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 13 March 2002.