

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/026/2003

14 March 2003

Further information on UA 136/01 (AMR 23/55/2001, 4 June 2001) and follow-ups (AMR 23/124/01, 11 December 2001; AMR 23/126/2001, 17 December 2001; AMR 23/018/2002, 8 February 2002) Fear for safety

COLOMBIA Forcibly displaced civilian communities of the Cacarica River Basin area and other displaced communities in the department of Chocó

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the Afro-Colombian civilian communities of the Cacarica River Basin (Cuenca del Cacarica) in the department of Chocó and the indigenous communities living in the same area, following threats received after the reported arrival of 500 army-backed paramilitaries to the area.

On 11 March, around 500 army-backed paramilitaries who are reportedly based in La Balsa, south of the Cacarica River Basin, entered the La Raya indigenous reserve and abducted a member of the community. They reportedly took him to the near-by Bequerá Perancho indigenous reserve and accused the community of being guerrilla collaborators. They threatened to return to the community in three months to set up a paramilitary base in the area known as La Virginia. The captured member of the La Raya reserve was reportedly released the following day and the paramilitaries threatened to enter the Nueva Vida community before returning to their base.

According to reports, on 13 March a group of 300 men claiming to be from the group *Centro Norte Medio Salquí*, of the *Bloque Elmer Cárdenas*, Elmer Cárdenas Block of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, (AUC), United Self Defence Forces of Colombia, entered the Nueva Vida community in Cacarica under the command of a man known as "*Pecherón*" or "7-7". He was according to eye witnesses, wearing the camouflage uniform and insignia of the XVII Brigade of the Colombian army. The paramilitaries reportedly accused the civilian population of being drug traffickers and guerrillas.

Members of the community were reportedly told that the paramilitaries planned to remain in the area and that they would have to get used to seeing them around. They were also reportedly told that the paramilitaries had a list with the names of various members of the community and that the paramilitaries would return for those on the list. One paramilitary was reported to have said, "*A mi no me va a detener nadie, porque yo tengo familia en el ejército, en la fiscalía y en la policía,*" No one is going to arrest me because I have family in the army, in the Attorney General's Office and in the police."

The Colombian authorities and security forces were reportedly informed of the latest paramilitary incursion on 12 March. Amnesty International is concerned that by action or omission the XVII Brigade is responsible for the actions of paramilitary groups which have threatened the Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations of the Cacarica River Basin.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years many of the inhabitants of the communities in the Cacarica River Basin area have returned to their lands after they were forced to flee their homes in the wake of joint paramilitary-military operations in the region in early 1997. During their forced displacement, the communities of the Cacarica River Basin were frequently subjected to death threats and human rights violations committed by army-backed paramilitaries. These often took place after they were labelled guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. During the process of return, several members of the communities have been killed and "disappeared", including community leader Freddy Gallego (see UA 240/00, AMR 23/058/00, 14 August 2000 and follow-ups). The communities have also faced repeated threats made by paramilitary forces who

have been able to enter the Cacarica River Basin despite the fact the area is heavily-militarized and despite repeated alerts to the Colombian security forces of the presence of paramilitary forces. Armed opposition groups have also been responsible for threats and killings against members of returned displaced communities in Chocó Department.

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the returned displaced community of Nueva Vida in the Cacarica River Basin area and indigenous communities living in the same area in the light of reports of a heavy paramilitary presence in the region and threats of further paramilitary incursion;
- urging the authorities to take all measures that the communities themselves deem appropriate to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Chocó, despite repeated commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Chocó, 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 and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No.7-26
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: **Presidente de la República, Bogotá, Colombia**

Fax: **+ 57 1 342 0592**

Salutation: **Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe/Dear President Uribe**

Minister of Defence

Ministra de Defensa Nacional
Martha Lucía Ramírez de Rincón
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52 OFI. 217
Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN)
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: **Ministra Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia**

Fax: **+ 57 1 266 0193**

Salutation: **Sra Ministra/Dear Minister**

Commander of the XVII Brigade of the Colombian Army

General Paucelino Latorre Gamboa
Carepa, Urabá, Colombia

Telegram: **Comandante XVII Brigada, Carepa, Urabá, Colombia**

Fax: **+ 57 4 823 6844 (if someone answers say “me da tono de fax por favor para General Latorre por favor”)**

Salutation: **Dear Commander/Sr Comandante**

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz
AA1029
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 25 April 2003.