

23 March 2001

Further information on UA 20/01 (AMR 23/006/2001, 26 January 2001) - Fear for Safety/Death threats/possible "disappearance"

COLOMBIA Civilian population in the districts of Kennedy, Progreso and Las Granjas in Barrancabermeja

new names: Civilian population in the districts of Boston and El Danubio in Barrancabermeja
Camilo HERNÁNDEZ (m), aged 14
Human rights defenders in Barrancabermeja

Army-backed paramilitaries raided more areas of Barrancabermeja on the night of 21-22 March, abducting a 14-year-old boy. They were able to proceed unhindered despite a heavy military presence, and although the authorities had been warned repeatedly about the incursions.

Since 16 March, paramilitaries have set up checkpoints in the north-east Comuna 6 district of the city. They have been able to operate these checkpoints even though army units are reportedly stationed in the area. They had warned several of the people they have stopped that they are going to attack the Boston district of the city, and that "*Va a ser sangre hasta para pintar las paredes*", "Enough blood will flow to paint the walls".

Local NGOs publicly denounced these threats, but the security forces apparently did nothing to prevent the paramilitary raids on the districts of El Danubio and Boston a few days later. The gunmen reportedly wore armbands with the initials "AUC", for the national paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. They apparently forced their way into several homes and warned the people inside to leave the area.

In Boston they reportedly abducted 14-year-old Camilo Hernández, whose whereabouts are now unknown.

The paramilitaries reportedly said that they were searching for "*colaboradores de la guerrilla y por los defensores de derechos humanos*", "guerrilla collaborators and human rights defenders". The security forces and their paramilitary allies often accuse human rights defenders of being guerrilla collaborators, and frequently follow up these accusations with serious human rights violations. Human rights defenders in Barrancabermeja have received a spate of death threats in recent months (see for example UA 22/01, AMR 23/008/2001, 29 January 2001, and follow-up, AMR 23/028/2001, 8 March 2001; and UA 12/01, AMR 23/003/2001, 18 January 2001).

Although a police unit reportedly arrested four paramilitaries who were about to kill a small child (who managed to escape), no decisive action has been taken in these heavily militarised districts to confront the paramilitaries. A military post of the *Batallón Héroes de Majagual*, Héroes de Majagual Battalion, of the army's V Brigade is situated in the Boston district.

Besides Comuna 6, paramilitaries are maintaining a presence in the districts of Barrios Versalles, Progreso, Kennedy, Chico and la Esperanza.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of civilians in the El Danubio and Boston districts of Barrancabermeja city, which have been attacked by paramilitaries;
- expressing particular concern for the safety of human rights defenders, whom the paramilitaries reportedly say they are targeting;
- urging the authorities to do everything necessary to protect people living in these districts, and reminding them that failure to do so will be seen as evidence of the security forces' complicity with paramilitary groups;
- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no real action against paramilitary groups in the Barrancabermeja area, despite their own commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;
- expressing concern for the safety of 14-year-old Camilo Hernández, who has reportedly "disappeared" following his abduction by the paramilitaries;
- urging the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into the raids on Boston and El Danubio, and recent raids elsewhere in Barrancabermeja, and for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Santander, urging that the results are made public, and that those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 Carrera 8 No.7-26
 Santafé de Bogotá
 COLOMBIA

Faxes: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351/286 74 34/ 286 68 42/284 21 86

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

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

Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Fax: + 57 1 222 1874/288 4906

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

Commander of the V Brigade

Comandante de la V Brigada
 General Martín Orlando Carreño Sandoval
 Calle 14, Carrera 33
 Bucaramanga, Santander,
 COLOMBIA

Faxes: +57 76 359 189 / 334 390

Salutation: Dear Commander / Sr. Commandante

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 organization

CREDHOS

AA 505

Barrancabermeja

Santander, 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 4 May 2001.