

UA 90/99

Fear for Safety/Torture/Possible extrajudicial
executions/"Disappearance"

27 April

COLOMBIA Civilian inhabitants of the municipalities of Simití and San Pablo,
Bolívar Department.

Ismael Rincón Sierra, Alfiodys Durán Rodríguez, Ernesto Fernández Botero and
three others (tortured and killed). Américo N. and Armando Mier
Urueta (killed).

There is grave concern for the safety of people living in the municipalities
of San Pablo and Simití, Bolívar department.

Since 12 April 1999 the Colombian Air Force, army and their paramilitary allies
have been involved in intensive operations to track down members of the *Ejército
de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), National Liberation Army, who hijacked a passenger
aircraft that day (see News Service 69/99, AMR 23/60/99).

These operations have reportedly involved intensive and indiscriminate aerial
bombardment of rural areas around the towns of San Pablo and Simití by the
Colombian Air Force, forcing up to 1000 people to flee their homes. Since 13
April 1999, paramilitary forces have surrounded rural communities in both
municipalities, forbidding the distribution of food or medical supplies to
the civilian population.

Heavily armed paramilitaries in uniform have been patrolling the streets of
the municipal capital of San Pablo, reportedly with the cooperation of the
security forces. Between 18 and 19 April Ismael Rincon Sierra, Alfiodys Duran
Rodriguez, Ernesto Fernandez Botero and three other inhabitants of San Pablo
were tortured and killed by paramilitaries. Several other people are believed
to have "disappeared".

Residents of San Pablo have also been forced to attend meetings held by the
paramilitaries, where they have been told that those named on a *lista negra*,
blacklist, reportedly believed to be guerilla sympathizers, will be killed.
Residents have also been told that they will have to leave San Pablo unless
they make payments to the paramilitaries every month.

Paramilitaries are also believed to be responsible for the killing of Americo
N , Armando Mier Urueta and another resident of San Pablo whose bodies were
all found in Simití.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peasant communities in disputed zones in Colombia's long running civil conflict
have frequently suffered human rights violations. Neither the armed forces and their
paramilitary allies nor the left wing armed opposition groups recognize the civilian
population's neutrality in the conflict.

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies
continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Over the
past five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups
throughout the country. 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 in many areas of the country.

The civilian population and human rights defenders in San Pablo and Simití have often been persecuted by paramilitary forces (see UA 176/98, AMR 23/40/98, and follow-ups).

Armed opposition groups have also been responsible for serious human rights violations. Amnesty International has strongly condemned the hijack of the domestic air service and the taking hostage of its crew and passengers, and has called for their immediate and unconditional release.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of inhabitants of the municipalities of Simití and San Pablo in the department of Bolívar;
- urging that the Colombian Air-Force takes all necessary precautions to avoid any direct attacks on the civilian population and to refrain from any indiscriminate or disproportionate aerial bombardment;
- urging full and impartial investigations into the reported killings in the municipalities of San Pablo and Simití, that the results be made public and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the area and urging that those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments;
- urging the Colombian authorities, in the context of condemning the hijack of the aircraft as a serious violation of international humanitarian law, not to authorise military operations which will lead to violations of the human rights of the civilian population in the area, in their efforts to secure the release of the hostages.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andres Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Tx: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/ 284 2186/ 337 1351

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Fax:+ 57 1 286 8025

Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Rodrigo Lloreda, Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Alternative Legal Association

MINGA, AA 40303, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia.

Advocate for the People:

Dr. José Fernando Castro Caycedo

Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo

Calle 55 No.10-32, 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 7 June 1999.