

UA 176/98

Fear for Safety / Possible Extrajudicial  
Executions

12 June 1998

COLOMBIAErmes VILLAMIZAR (killed)

Olga PALENCIA Ermes Villamizar (reportedly killed)

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Civilian population of Simití, Bolívar department.

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There is serious concern for the safety of inhabitants of the municipality of Simití, department of Bolívar, following an attack on 11 June 1998 by gunmen believed to be members of a paramilitary group.

The armed group, who wore army-issue uniforms and were heavily armed, launched the attack against the community of Cerro de Burgos, in the municipality of Simití and were reportedly in possession of a *lista negra*, "black list" of intended victims - those they accuse of being guerrilla sympathizers. Those believed to be guerrilla sympathizers and collaborators by the Colombian security forces or their paramilitary allies often become victims of human rights violations.

Ermes Villamizar, whose name was believed to be on the black list, was reportedly beaten and forcibly abducted by the armed group. He is subsequently believed to have been killed. When his sister-in-law, Olga Palencia Ermes Villamizar, attempted to intervene to prevent his abduction she was also reportedly beaten and killed. Several houses were then reportedly ransacked and set alight before they proceeded to force three boatmen to take them to the nearby hamlet of Vijaguel.

Though a Colombian Army and Police post situated in the town of Simití were informed at the time of the attack against Cerro de Burgos, patrols failed to arrive in the area until the morning of 12 June. Reports also suggest that two Colombian Navy boats docked opposite Vijaguel failed to take any action.

The paramilitary incursion has resulted in a large number of people fleeing their homes to seek refuge in the municipal capital.

Despite warnings to the Colombian authorities by local people, state officials and Amnesty International (see UA 156/98, AMR 23/43/98, 18 May 1998), of the possibility of an attack against the community of Simití, the authorities nevertheless failed to take decisive preventive action.

The fact that this attack follows so soon after the paramilitary incursion into Barrancabermeja in the department of Santander, in which over 30 people were killed or "disappeared", on 16 May heightens concerns for the security of inhabitants of Simití and San Pablo as well as others in the south of the department of Bolívar and the communities of Yondó (department of Antioquia) and Cantagallo (department of Santander) which are close to Barrancabermeja and have also been threatened with large-scale paramilitary attack.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Peasant communities in disputed zones in Colombia's long running civil conflict have frequently suffered attacks. Neither the left wing armed opposition groups nor the armed forces and their paramilitary allies 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.

President Ernesto Samper Pizano has repeatedly promised to improve the human rights situation and to dismantle paramilitary forces, but no steps have been taken to control their actions and to hold members accountable for serious and widespread human rights violations. The Attorney General recently stated that over 200 outstanding arrest warrants issued against alleged paramilitary members have still not been acted upon by the security forces.

**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 municipality of Simití and San Pablo in the department of Bolívar, Yondó, department of Antioquia, Cantagallo and Barrancabermeja, department of Santander;
- urging full and impartial investigations into the reported killings in the municipality of Simití on 11 June 1998, 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.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano, Presidente de la República  
Palacio de Nariño, carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telexes: 44281 PALP CO**

**Faxes: + 57 1 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 286 7434**

**Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper**

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Alfonso López Caballero, 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**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405**

**Salutation:Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gilberto Echeverri Mejía, 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.

and to diplomatic representatives of COLOMBIA accredited to your country

If possible please also write to your own political representatives including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

- expressing concern that though a number of warnings of possible attacks against the community of Simití were issued, including by Amnesty International, the Colombian authorities nevertheless failed to take decisive action thereby leaving the communities listed above under threat
- urging your government to take immediate action to press the Colombian Government to take immediate measures to protect the civilian community..

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 July 1998.