

UA 178/98

Extrajudicial executions / Fear for safety

18 June 1998

COLOMBIA Samuel VELÁSQUEZ, 18 years old } murdered
Carlos Alberto TANUGAMA, 16 years old }

Fear for the safety of members of the Embera Katio indigenous community in Sabaleta, Chocó department

On 11 June 1998, ten members of a paramilitary group reportedly arrived in El Diez (situated in the hamlet of Sabaleta in the municipality of El Carmen de Atrato, department of Chocó) and began to fire indiscriminately, killing two people. They then informed the 350 inhabitants that, unless they left their homes within 24 hours, they would be killed and their homes and the surrounding mountains bombed.

Members of the community subsequently fled, some taking refuge in the surrounding mountain areas and the remaining fleeing to El Carmen del Atrato.

Two members are known to have gone to the municipal capital to denounce the attack to the human rights ombudsman (*personero*).

The same paramilitary group has allegedly been responsible for intimidating other members of nearby indigenous communities, regularly accusing them of being guerrilla sympathizers. Though the Colombian Army is reportedly aware of the location of the paramilitary group's base they have failed to take any preventative action against them.

Although a Colombian army captain acknowledged the presence of paramilitary groups in the area, in a meeting he attended on 13 June with the *Organización Indígena Regional Embera Wounaan* (OREWA), Embera Wounaan Regional Indigenous Organization, and the mayor of El Carmen de Atrato, he claimed the army did not have the capacity to act. Later that day an armed confrontation took place between paramilitary groups and guerrilla forces operating in the area.

According to witnesses later that day a group of 50 paramilitary group members travelling towards Sabaleta forcibly abducted Samuel Velásquez and Carlos Alberto Tanugama, two members of the Sabaleta indigenous community. Their bodies were found abandoned on the road which runs between the departmental capital, Quibdó and El Carmen de Atrato in the morning of 14 June.

Given the failure of the authorities to take decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups in the department and in the light of a spate of killings of members of indigenous and black communities, including those living in the municipality of Murindó, department of Chocó, Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of members of the indigenous community, approximately 200 of whom are currently displaced in El Carmen del Atrato. The remaining 150 members of the community are reportedly sheltering in the surrounding mountains.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peasant, black and indigenous communities living in disputed zones in Colombia's long running civil conflict are frequently attacked. 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 Sabaleta, municipality of El Carmen de Atrato;
- urging full and impartial investigations into the reported killings of two indigenous people on 13 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

Governor of the Department of Chocó

Señor Juan B. Hinestroza
Gobernador del Departamento del Chocó
Gobernación del Chocó
Quibdó, Chocó
Colombia

Fax: +57 497 11777

Telegrams: Gobernador del Chocó, Quibdó, Colombia

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Hinestroza

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

SEMBRAR
AA 34692
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 30 July 1998.