

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 23/47/94
Distr: UA/SC

UA 222/94

Torture and Extrajudicial Execution

10 June 1994

COLOMBIA

Benjamin SANTOS, aged 22

On 27 April 1994 Benjamín Santos was taken from his home by members of an army counterinsurgency unit. Two days later he was dead, his body showing signs of severe torture. His detention and murder follow a pattern of abuses against civilians in rural Colombia, and more like him will die or "disappear" at the hands of the military unless the authorities take urgent and genuine steps to end the impunity that is rife in Colombia. If, as has been reported in recent days, the Colombian government is truly concerned about its image abroad, there can be no better start than to immediately investigate this atrocity and bring its perpetrators to justice.

On 27 April, members of the army's 2nd Mobile Brigade (*Brigada Móvil No. 2*) operating from the Nueva Granada battalion (*Batallón Nueva Granada*) based in Barrancabermeja, were conducting a counterinsurgency operation in the region. During the operation they searched the property where Benjamín Santos lived in the community of Meseta de San Rafael. He was subsequently taken away and sources state that he was later seen in military uniform, being forced to patrol surrounding communities with the Brigade. His family denounced his detention to the Barrancabermeja regional office of the People's Defender, *la Defensoría Regional*.

On 29 April Benjamín Santos' body was taken to Barrancabermeja cemetery. In a press statement, the military authorities claimed it was the body of "an unidentified guerrilla killed in a confrontation with troops attached to the Nueva Granada Battalion" ("*NN guerrillero dado de baja en combate con tropas adscritas al Batallón Nueva Granada*"). Benjamín Santos' relatives, who identified the body, said it showed signs of severe torture: he had multiple bruising consistent with beating, his tongue had been cut out and his testicles damaged.

Forcing residents of rural communities to accompany military patrols as guides or porters is one of the most frequently reported abuses of civilians in Colombia. Many victims subsequently "disappear" or are extrajudicially executed, apparently after torture. Those killed in this way are routinely described by the military as guerrillas killed in combat.

Despite frequent and ample evidence of military culpability in case after case of grave human rights abuse, few members of the security forces have been brought to justice. The vast majority of those responsible for gross violations remain in active service.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In Colombia in recent years, human rights abuses have been widespread and systematic, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearance", torture and arbitrary arrest. In the two months since Amnesty International (AI) launched a campaign on rising political killings in Colombia, the government has not responded to the organization's evidence of such abuses or its recommendations on how to improve the protection of human rights. In recent weeks the Colombian media has reported that the government considers an AI advertisement focusing on human rights abuses in Colombia and placed in newspapers in the United Kingdom (UK) to be a threat to its good commercial relationship with the UK and other

European nations. It was also reported that the government is planning a public relations strategy to clean up its image in Europe. Al issued a press release challenging the government, if it is truly concerned about its image, to take serious steps to end impunity by ensuring that members of its security forces act within the law and that those who do not be held to account.

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

- expressing grave concern at the detention, torture and killing of Benjamín Santos, reportedly by members of the army's Mobile Brigade;
- urging that there be an immediate and thorough investigation, the results of which should be made public and urging that those found responsible be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take genuine and concrete steps to end the impunity with which its armed forces are carrying out human rights abuses;
- urging that all possible measures be taken to protect civilians living in areas undergoing counterinsurgency operations.

APPEALS TO

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño, Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Gaviria

2) Procurator General:

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta Padilla
 Procurador General de la Nación
 Procuraduría General
 Edificio Banco Ganadero
 Carrera 5, No. 15-80
 Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 284 0472

Salutation:Sr. Procurador de la Nación/Dear Dr. Arrieta

3) Advocate for the People:

Dr. Jaime Córdoba Triviño
 Defensor del Pueblo
 Defensoría del Pueblo
 Calle 35 No. 7-25 piso 5
 Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Defensor del Pueblo Trivino, Defensoria del Pueblo, Bogota, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 288 6683

Salutation: Estimado Dr Triviño/Dear Dr. Triviño

4) Minister of Defence

Dr. Rafael Pardo Rueda
 Ministro de Defensa Nacional
 Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
 Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52
 Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams:Ministro de Defensa Pardo Rueda, Bogota, Colombia
Telexes:42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO
Faxes:+ 57 1 222 1874
Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace
Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz
AA 31861
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 22 July 1994.