

1 July 1998

**Further information on UA 176/98 (AMR 23/38/98, 12 June 1998) - Fear for safety / Possible extrajudicial executions**

**COLOMBIA Civilian inhabitants of the municipalities of Simití, Bolívar department, and neighbouring areas Santa Rosa del Sur and San Pablo**

**Ermes Villamizar (killed)**

**Olga Palencia (killed - please note correction of name)**

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Another massacre of civilians caught in the middle of Colombia's internal strife is feared to be imminent following another paramilitary incursion into the Cerro de Burgos community, municipality of Simití, department of Bolívar on 29 June 1998.

The municipal capital of Simití is now completely surrounded by paramilitary forces, who also control transit along the river Magdalena and roads leading to the nearby municipalities of Santa Rosa del Sur, San Pablo and to several communities in the Simití municipality.

On 29 June the paramilitary group reportedly arrived in six boats and entered the community of Cerro de Burgos, which was abandoned after the 11 June paramilitary attack (see original UA) during which two people died.

Following the incursion, non-governmental human rights organizations quickly denounced it to the headquarters of the *V Brigada*, 5 Brigade of the Colombian Army in Bucaramanga, department of Santander, which operates in the region, calling on the army to protect the civilian population.

They also contacted the State and governmental authorities, as well as the commander of Simití municipality's police station, who reportedly stated that he had already been in contact with the *Base Militar Santa Rosa del Sur*, Santa Rosa del Sur Military Base, the Colombian Navy and the regional police command.

According to inhabitants of the municipality of Simití, at least ten vehicles were seen transporting paramilitary members to several communities in the municipality on the evening of 29 June.

On the morning of 30 June non-governmental human rights organizations again contacted the 5 Brigade. A commanding officer reportedly told them that the paramilitary incursion was a peaceful operation which sought to inform displaced members of the community of Cerro de Burgos that they could return to their homes in safety and that the paramilitary operation was only targeted at guerrilla collaborators. The commander, a colonel, reportedly committed himself to protecting the civilian population. At a 23 June meeting attended by representatives of human rights organizations and of the municipality of Simití, the same colonel reportedly stated that the population of Simití was collaborating with guerrilla forces. In the past those accused of being guerrilla collaborators by the armed forces or their paramilitary allies have subsequently become victims of serious human rights violations.

Concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the municipality of Simití is heightened by the fact that a military base situated in the municipality of Simití, attached to the *Batallón Galán*, Galán Battalion, was withdrawn on 25 June, in spite of denunciations by the local inhabitants of paramilitary incursions in the area. The withdrawal of security forces is often a prelude to paramilitary attacks. Troops

stationed at this military base reportedly failed to respond to the paramilitary attack against Cerro de Burgos on 11 June (see original UA for details). Inhabitants of the neighbouring municipality of San Pablo are also feared to be in danger following the killing a health worker -- reportedly by paramilitary force members -- on 23 June, in the hamlet of Carmen del Cucú, of Eustaquio Ardila.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian population in Simití, San Pablo and Santa Rosa del Sur municipalities in Bolívar department;
- urging that a full and impartial investigations be conducted into the reported killings of Ermes Villamizar and Olga Palencia in Simití municipality on 11 June 1998 and the killing of Eustaquio Ardila on 23 June, reportedly by paramilitary forces, 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 / 228 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 and neighbouring areas have been issued, including by Amnesty International, the Colombian authorities have nevertheless failed to take decisive action to confront paramilitary forces operating in the area 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 12 August 1998.