

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 23/51/92

Distr: UA/SC

UA 314/92 Death Threats

9 October 1992

COLOMBIA: Oliva BALLONA (female), peasant leader
 Avelino DOMÍNGUEZ, peasant leader
 Octavio SIERRA, peasant farmer

Amnesty International has learned with concern of serious harassment and death threats against members of the civilian population, including the above named peasant farmers and leaders, by members of the Colombian army and paramilitary forces under their command, in central Colombia's Magdalena Medio region.

According to reports, in recent weeks the Colombian army's Mobile Brigade No 2, Brigada Móvil No 2, together with personnel from the army's Luciano D'Elhuyar Battalion, have carried out a series of joint military operations with paramilitary forces in several localities in the municipalities of San Vicente and Carmen de Chucurí, Santander department, Magdalena Medio region. Among the communities most recently affected are Guamales, Tambo Redondo, La Colorada, Pamplona, Granada and El Filón.

Peasant farmers have been called to meetings at which they have reportedly been told by the military and paramilitary commanders that they must co-operate with the paramilitary forces by paying regular "taxes" to finance paramilitary groups and by actively participating in paramilitary patrols and operations against guerrilla organizations. Peasant farmers who refuse to co-operate with the paramilitary groups have been tortured, "disappeared" and killed. Many others have fled the region. The joint army/paramilitary patrols have reportedly arrived in several of the villages with lists of local community leaders who have been warned to leave the area within days or face death.

Oliva Ballona of Guamales vereda and Avelino Domínguez of La Colorada veredas in San Vicente de Chucurí, both regional leaders of the Colombian National Peasants' Association, Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos, ANUC, were threatened with death by members of the Colombian army in September 1992. Although Avelino Domínguez has since left the area, Oliva Ballona has been forced by the army to remain in the village of Guamales and there is concern for her safety. The threats against the two peasant leaders are believed to be connected to official complaints of harassment of peasant communities by the army and paramilitary forces made by regional ANUC leaders in July 1992 to local authorities in San Vicente de Chucurí. The complaint was later formally ratified by Oliva Ballona and Avelino Domínguez in the presence of military commanders in the Luciano D'Elhuyar Battalion based in San Vicente de Chucurí.

Octavio Sierra of the community of Pamplona, municipality of San Vicente de Chucurí, was ordered to present himself on 15 September 1992 in a base established by the Mobile Brigade No 2 where he was photographed and threatened with death. He was reportedly told he had five days to leave the region or he would be killed. When

he attempted to leave the area, the bus in which he was travelling with his family was intercepted by a paramilitary patrol whose members reportedly told him that the only reason they would not kill him there and then because there were too many witnesses. He later managed to leave the area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The largely rural area of the Magdalena Medio in central Colombia has been a focus of political violence for several years following the emergence of guerrilla groups in the 1960s and the subsequent militarization of the region during the 1980s. Despite the progress that has been made through peace talks between several of the guerrilla groups and the government, there has been a

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continuation of political violence. In areas where guerrilla forces are active, the local population is often perceived by the armed forces as potential guerrilla collaborators and has, as a result, been subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution by army personnel and paramilitary forces.

Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal basis for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombian armed forces to combat and disband such groups, paramilitary forces have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents with impunity in many areas of the country and continue to operate with the support of the Colombian armed forces.

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

- expressing concern at the reported threats by army and paramilitary personnel against peasant farmers Oliva Ballona, Avelino Domínguez and Octavio Sierra;
- urging that there be an immediate investigation and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging that the Colombian authorities take all necessary measures to protect the lives of civilians and ensure that they are able to carry out their lawful activities;
- urging that the Colombian government take effective measures to ensure that paramilitary forces be dismantled;
- requesting that an investigation should be conducted into alleged links between the Colombian armed forces and paramilitary groups in the region of San Vicente and Carmen de Chucurí in Santander department, the results of which should be made public.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of the Republic:
Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Santa Fe de Bogotá,
Colombia

Telegrams: Presidente Gaviria, Bogotá,
Colombia
Telexes: 44281 PALP CO
Faxes: +571 283 3066,
+571 286 7324, +571 287 7937

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr.
Presidente /
Dear President Gaviria

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

Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogotá,
Colombia
Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO, 44561 CFAC CO
Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr Ministro /
Dear Minister

2) Minister of Defence:

3) Commander of II Division:

Mayor General Harold Bedoya Pizarro
Comandante de la Segunda División del
Ejército
Bucaramanga
Santander, Colombia

**Telegrams: Comandante Segunda Division
del Ejercito, Bucaramanga,
Santander, Colombia**

Salutation: Sr. Comandante / Dear Sir

4) Procurator General:

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

**Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta,
Bogotá, Colombia**

Telexes: 41224 PRGEN CO, 41213 PGNDP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 0472

**Salutation: Sr Procurador General de la
Nación / Dear Dr Arrieta**

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Human Rights group:

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz
AA 52332
Santa Fe 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 20 November 1992.