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Colombia: Indigenous leader "disappeared" as communities are caught in cross fire

The indigenous and peasant communities of the Rivers Sinú and Verde, department of Córdoba, are finding themselves increasingly caught up in the cross fire between guerrilla groups and army-backed paramilitaries, Amnesty International said today.

The organization's concern for the safety of the civilian communities in the area is growing in the light of the recent "disappearance" of Embera-Katío indigenous leader Kimy Pernia Domico, reportedly abducted by paramilitaries, and the massacre of at least nine peasant farmers reportedly at the hands of guerrilla forces in the Embera-Katío indigenous territory

The communities of the Rivers Sinú and Verde have also recently had their access to the municipal capital Tierralta cut off by an illegal paramilitary checkpoint operating in Colas del Embalse Urrá. This checkpoint has reportedly been able to operate unchallenged despite reports that contingents of the XI Brigade of the Colombian Army are located nearby.

"These killings, the 'disappearance' of Kimy Pernia and the operation of an illegal paramilitary checkpoint illustrate how both sides in the conflict refuse to respect the lives of the civilian population," Amnesty International said, calling on all parties to the conflict to abide by international humanitarian standards.

The organization is also urging the Colombian authorities take immediate action to establish the whereabouts of Kimy Pernia and

guarantee his safety as well as that of the indigenous and peasant communities in the area.

"The Colombian government should take decisive steps to tackle the problem of paramilitarism, to investigate its links with the security forces and to bring to justice all those involved in human rights abuses perpetrated both by paramilitaries and by guerrilla groups," Amnesty International added.

Background

Three armed gunmen, thought to be army-backed paramilitaries belonging to the *Autodefensas Unidas de Córdoba y Urabá*, (ACCU), United Self-Defence Groups of Córdoba and Urabá, abducted Kimy Pernia Domico in the municipality of Tierralta, department of Córdoba, on the evening of 2 June. He tried to flee, but was apparently forced onto a motorcycle at gunpoint. Two of his abductors rode with him on one motorcycle, while the third followed behind on another. He again attempted to escape but was recaptured. He has not been seen since his abduction.

Kimy Pernia Domico is a leader of the Embera-Katío indigenous people, who live along the rivers Sinú and Verde in the department of Córdoba. He has played a leading role in the indigenous communities' campaign against construction of the Urrá dam. In recent years, several Embera-Katío indigenous communities campaigning against the construction of the Urrá Dam, which will destroy much of their ancestral lands, have been targeted by paramilitary forces working in alliance with the security forces. Community leaders have also been killed by guerrilla forces, who have accused them of siding with the paramilitary or security forces.

On 22 May, the guerrilla forces Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, killed nine peasant farmers, who had been travelling along the Sinú River in the community of Zambudó, which is in the indigenous reserve. Nine more peasant farmers who were thought to have been killed by the FARC were today reported to have returned to their homes unharmed.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>