

UA 241/00

Fear forexecution

COLOMBIAJaime Enrique VARGAS ZAPATA

His son Jhon Alvaro VARGAS RIVERA, aged 10

Civilian population of Carmen de Atrato, Chocó department

killed: Juan Antonio VARGAS RIVERA, aged 9

A nine-year old boy has been shot dead, reportedly by soldiers, while scavenging for food. The army claimed first that he was a guerilla killed in combat, and later that he had been killed by guerillas.

The boy was from Carmen de Atrato, in the northwestern department of Chocó. Amnesty International fears the municipality's civilian population are in grave danger.

A number of people had ventured from their villages in the municipality on 8 August to search for food among the supplies abandoned nearby by guerillas, who had withdrawn the previous day after a prolonged attack on the town. Soldiers apparently opened fire on the villagers as they began gathering food, killing nine-year-old Juan Antonio Vargas Rivera. They caught his 10-year-old brother, Jhon Alvaro, bound and gagged him, and beat him, accusing him of being a guerilla. The boy was later released.

Those responsible are believed to be from the army's "Nutibara" Battalion or the No.4 "Granaderos" Battalion, which are attached to the Fourth Brigade.

The boys' father, Jaime Enrique Vargas Zapata, who was constantly accompanied by officers from the Fourth Brigade, went to the local human rights ombudsman (*Personería municipal*) to file a complaint, but was told that he could only do this if he was prepared to say that his son was killed in an armed confrontation between the army and the guerrillas, which he refused to do. He was unable to check what was in the complaint as he is illiterate.

In a separate incident a group of schoolchildren on an excursion reportedly came under fire from soldiers on 15 August, in the neighbouring department of Antioquia, which is also under the command of the Fourth Brigade. The soldiers reportedly claimed that guerrillas were hiding in the group. Six children were reportedly killed and several injured, and two are unaccounted for.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The armed opposition group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, attacked Carmen de Aratro on 5 August. The army regained control of the town after two days. During the FARC attack two civilians, three policemen and at least eight soldiers were reportedly killed.

The Colombian army and security forces, and their paramilitary allies, commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. In the last five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. 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.

Guerrilla forces have also committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, including executing those they accuse of collaborating with the security forces or paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern at reports that nine-year-old Juan Antonio Vargas Rivera was shot dead by soldiers, who then beat his 10-year-old brother;
- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian population of Carmen de Atrato;
- expressing concern for the safety of Jaime Enrique Vargas Zapata, and asking the authorities to ensure that he is assisted in filing a complaint about the killing of his son;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the apparent extrajudicial execution of Juan Antonio Vargas Rivera and the ill-treatment of his brother, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible are brought to justice;
- expressing concern at reports that soldiers killed six children on a school excursion in Antioquia on 15 August, and calling for a full and impartial investigation, with the results made public and those found responsible brought to justice;
- calling for all those implicated to be suspended from duty until the investigations are completed;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434 / 284 2186 / 337 1351

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Humberto De La Calle, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No. 8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5584 / 342 3201 / 341 9739

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña, Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé 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

Commander of the IV Brigade

Brigadier General Coronel Eduardo Herrera Verbel

Comandante de la Cuarta Brigada
Calle 50 No.76-126
Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia
Faxes:+ 57 4 230 4411 - 230 5127
Salutation: Sr. Brigadier General/ Dear Brigadier General

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental organisation
Corporación Jurídica Libertad
Apartado Aérea 49027
Medellín, 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 27 September 2000.