

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 383/93 Fear for Safety

29 October 1993

COLOMBIA The young people of Villatina, neighbourhood of Medellín
Department of Antioquia.

Amnesty International is concerned by recent acts of intimidation and shootings which point to a continuing campaign of violence against young people on the streets of Villatina, a poor neighbourhood on the outskirts of Medellín, Antioquia department.

On 25 September 1993 a taxi carrying several men dressed in civilian clothing and armed with long-range weapons, reportedly drove around the streets of the neighbourhood of Villatina. On 29 September armed men dressed in civilian clothing in a jeep shot at a group of youths who were talking in the street. No-one was injured.

Amnesty International believes that these incidents form part of a continuing campaign of victimization of the young people of Villatina. Community leaders, students and unemployed youths in shanty towns surrounding the major cities have increasingly been targeted by "death squads". Reports of "death squad" style attacks on young people in shanty towns surrounding Medellín increased dramatically after Pablo Escobar and several other leading drug-traffickers escaped from prison in July 1992. After the escapes, attacks on police agents in Medellín escalated. In a three-month period over 60 police officers were killed in Medellín by gunmen reportedly employed by Pablo Escobar. The police took their revenge indiscriminately killing youths in the shanty towns from where they apparently suspect the drug-traffickers recruit their gunmen. Only hours after two police agents were shot dead in the centre of Medellín in November 1992, 12 masked men armed with automatic rifles raided Villatina and killed 9 children, aged 17 and under. The youngest victims were a boy and a girl, both aged eight. Seven of the children were members of a religious youth organization, "Builders of the Future". The press reported the massacre and quoted a member of the local administration as saying that the victims "were innocent, only students, and young people who had nothing to do with the war the government has declared on the outlaws". Following this on 31 December 1992, a similar act of intimidation as those that have occurred recently, took place. There has been no attempt by the authorities to put a halt to these events nor to bring those responsible to justice, and the population of Villatina is fearful for its children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years widespread and systematic human rights violations have occurred in Colombia, including torture, arbitrary arrest, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution. President César Gaviria Trujillo has repeatedly pledged his government's commitment to protect human rights. However, members of the Colombian armed and security forces continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Civic leaders, trade unionists, human rights activists and those considered "social undesirables" are amongst the groups frequently targeted by the security forces, including the National Police, for arbitrary arrest and other forms of human rights abuse.

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

- urging the authorities to investigate the attempted shooting of various youths on the street in Villatina, neighbourhood of Medellín, Antioquia department;
- urging that there be full and impartial investigations into past massacres and acts of intimidation and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take all possible measures to protect the lives of the population, and more specifically of the young people, of Villatina.

APPEALS TO

1) President of Colombia:

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

Telegrams: President Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7324/7434, 287 7937

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Gaviria

2) Attorney General

Dr. Gustavo de Greiff
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 287 0939

Salutation: Estimado Dr. de Greiff/Dear Dr. de Greiff

3) Police chief of Medellín

Señor Comandante Policía Metropolitana
 Brigadier General J. Antonio Rodríguez Q.
 Calle 48, No. 45-58
 Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Señor Comandante Policía Metropolitana, Medellín, Colombia

Faxes: +57 4 251 8959

Salutation: Estimado Brigadier General / Dear Brigadier General

4) Commander of the 4th Brigade, Colombian army

Señor Comandante de la IV Brigada
 Cuarta Brigada de Institutos Militares
 Calle 50, No. 76-126
 Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Señor Comandante de la IV Brigada, Medellín, Colombia

Salutation: Estimado Sr. Comandante/Dear Commander

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

1) Local Human Rights and Educational Organization:

Comite Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos
 "Hector Abad Gomez" - Seccional Antioquia
 Apartado Aéreo 50645
 Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

2) Advocate for the People:

Dr. Jaime Córdoba Triviño
 Defensor del Pueblo
 Defensoría del Pueblo

Avenida 39, No. 16-42
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia
Faxes: + 57 1 232 4640

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 10 December 1993.