

UA 299/00

Fear for Safety / possible "Disappearances"

26 September

**COLOMBIA civilian populations of the Cimitarra River Valley in the Magdalena Medio region including Eduardo AMARIS PEREZ and five peasant farmers (feared "disappeared")**

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A tradesman has "disappeared" after threats from paramilitaries allied to the armed forces who have also ordered several communities to leave their homes in the heavily militarised Magdalena Medio region in central Colombia. In light of the continued failure of the armed forces to protect the civilian population of the region Amnesty International fears for its safety.

Eduardo Amaris Perez, a tradesman who sells spare parts for pressure cookers, has not been seen since 16 September when he was in Puerto Wilches on the Magdalena river, two months after paramilitaries ordered him to leave the area.

On the same day, in a separate attack along the Cimitarra river, a tributary of the Magdalena river, paramilitary forces killed two elderly people and two labourers before burning down the houses in the hamlet of La Esperanza. In Puerto Machete, another peasant farmer was killed and his body thrown into the river, and a cooperative organised by the *Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra* (ACVC), Peasant Farmers' Association of the Cimitarra River Valley, was ransacked. Paramilitaries have reportedly prevented the removal of the bodies of some four other peasants which are lying in the outskirts of the nearby Cuatro Bocas settlement.

On 8 September, paramilitary forces killed Andrés Parra and four other peasant farmers in La Rompida, municipality of Yondó, throwing their bodies into the Magdalena River. The whereabouts of five other peasant farmers remains unknown.

The paramilitary forces reportedly travelled in four boats and used a helicopter unhindered by the security forces despite numerous reports about the presence of a helicopter and the fact that this area is heavily militarised. The paramilitaries have now reportedly set up permanent check points in several places along the river valley: La Rompida which is near the Barrancabermeja naval base, Las Palmas and Puerto Machete.

No decisive effort has been taken to confront or dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area or to bring security force members, operating in unison with paramilitary forces, to justice, despite numerous reports of paramilitary activity in the area in recent months (see UA 81/00; AMR 23/19/00; 10 April 2000 and UA 100/00; AMR 23/29/00; 28 April 2000) and despite the close proximity of the naval base.

Dozens of families from the civilian populations of Cuatro Bocas, San Lorenzo, La Victoria, La Esperanza and Yanacué have reportedly taken refuge in the jungle, whilst some 500 people have fled to the city of Barrancabermeja.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Colombian armed 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, who continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country despite the government making it illegal to set up paramilitary organizations, and issuing directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989.

Guerrilla forces have also committed serious human rights abuses, including executions of people they accuse of collaborating with the security forces or paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Eduardo Amaris Perez and the missing peasant farmers, calling for a full and impartial investigation to establish their whereabouts, and for those responsible for their "disappearance" to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of the displaced communities of Cuatro Bocas, San Lorenzo, La Victoria, La Esperanza and Yanacué, and urging the authorities to take immediate and effective measures to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that four boats and a helicopter used by paramilitaries were allowed to operate freely in an area with a strong security force presence;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the Magdalena Medio region, urging that the results are made public, and that those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and decisive action to combat and dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Faxes: + 571 286 7434 / 287 7939 / 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 337 1351**

**Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr Presidente**

Minister of Interior

Dr. Humberto de la Calle

Ministro del Interior

Ministerio del Interior, Palacio Echeverry

Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025/284 0214**

**Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr Ministro**

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

**Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO**

**Faxes: + 571 222 1874**

**Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro**

**COPIES TO:**

Non governmental organisation

*Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra (ACVC), Peasant Farmers'*

*Association of the Cimitarra River Valley*

Calle 47 N°6-108, Of.202

Barrancabermeja, Santander, 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 7 November 2000.