

COLOMBIA Kidnapped six mayors of the department of Antioquia:

Humberto RESTREPO GARCÍA (m), Mayor of El Carmen de Viboral
Alirio HOYOS GALEANO (m), Mayor of El Peñol
Iván Darío CASTAÑO GÓMEZ (m), Mayor of Granada
Orlando GIRALDO CARDONA (m), Mayor of Guatapé
Juan Manuel OCHOA GIRALDO (m), Mayor of Marinilla
Hernando Luis MARTÍNEZ SUÁREZ (m), Mayor of San Luis
Pedro CHICA (m), Adviser on human rights and international humanitarian law

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the six mayors named above and human rights adviser Pedro Chica. They were all kidnapped in the municipality of San Francisco, department of Antioquia by members of the army-backed paramilitary group *Bloque Metro Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC)*, Metro Bloc of the Self-Defence Groups of Colombia.

According to press reports the men were abducted on 18 November. In a letter to the Governor of the department of Antioquia, Guillermo Gaviria Correa, dated 19 November, the AUC claim responsibility for the abduction. The AUC also make clear that it rejects recent talks between the mayors of eastern Antioquia Department and members of the armed opposition group *Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)*, National Liberation Army.

On 25 October, 23 mayors from the department of Antioquia reportedly initiated talks with the Carlos Alirio Buitrago Front of the ELN, in order to reach agreement on a truce, which is intended to last until April 2002. The truce is meant to allow enough time for the transfer of police stations from urban centres to locations away from civilian populations. If this is not possible, an alternative community police force is to be created, in order to avoid civilian casualties in military confrontations.

In its letter the AUC condemned these talks by saying:

"... as a matter of principle we have been opposed to regional dialogues between Mayors of Eastern Antioquia and the ELN guerrilla... [the] attitude of some mayors; atomize national dialogue, strengthen the guerrilla ... [the Mayors are engaged in]...Dark pacts which hardly benefit the region."

The AUC added that the six would be able to return to their work, "when they accept the high risk for the Country that their idle talk with the guerrilla represents".

The AUC suggestion that the kidnapped men were working towards "Dark pacts" and carrying out activities which strengthen guerrilla forces causes grave concern. In the past those accused of collaborating with guerrilla forces by the security forces and their paramilitary allies have often been the victim of serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" committed by the latter two allied groups.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Guerrilla forces of the ELN and the larger *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, have frequently carried out disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks against police and military bases located in towns and villages. These attacks have frequently resulted in civilian casualties. Mayors of eastern municipalities of Antioquia have

reportedly held meetings with the ELN in the region to try and reach agreement on measures which would avoid civilian casualties.

Guerrilla forces have been responsible for the majority of kidnappings and the taking of hostages. In 2000 they were responsible for 57 per cent of the approximate 3000 cases. Amongst those currently being held hostage by the FARC are at least four members of the Colombian Congress. Army-backed paramilitary forces have also resorted increasingly to kidnapping and hostage-taking.

Members of 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 - by action or omission - in many areas of the country.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- urging the authorities to take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety of the six mayors and the human rights adviser named above kidnapped by army-backed paramilitaries of the AUC in the department of Antioquia and to guarantee that they are released unharmed;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into their kidnapping, for the results to be made public and those responsible to be brought to justice;
- 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 1566 2071

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of Interior

Sr. Armando Estrada Villa

Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Palacio Echeverry
Carrera 8a, No. 8-09, piso 2o., Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 341 9583 / 334 3960

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr. Ministro

Governor of Antioquia

Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia

Sr Guillermo Gaviria Correa

Gobernación de Antioquia

Calle 42B, # 52-106

Medellín, Antioquia, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Gobernador Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia

Salutation: Dear Sir/Sr Gobernador

COPIES TO:

National Advocate for the people
Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz,
Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,
Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301,
Santafé 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 1 January 2002.