

11 December 2001

Further information on UA 136/01 (AMR 23/055/01, 4 June 2001) - Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA Forcibly displaced civilian communities of the Cacarica River Basin area and other displaced communities in the department of Chocó

Army-backed paramilitaries have arrived in the Cacarica River Basin (*Cuenca del Cacarica*) area in force, and have begun attacking communities there and in the surrounding area. The inhabitants had been forced to flee their homes in 1997, but recently returned to resettlement camps.

On 28 November a group of 100 armed men believed to be paramilitaries came to the Villa Hermosa-La Raya area, part of the community of the Cacarica River Basin. They opened fire on one of the houses with an M-60 heavy machine gun. The peasant farmers took cover in the cornfields, and reportedly saw the gunmen ransacking all the houses in the settlement and then setting fire to five of them. The paramilitaries reportedly burnt the settlement's store of approximately 16,000 kilos of rice (which would have fed them for six months) and took with them the community's work papers, identity documents and 900,000 pesos (US\$430). They reportedly left a note at the entrance to each house inviting the peasant farmers to give up their civilian status and join them.

These paramilitary incursions coincide with further death threats against members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó in neighbouring Antioquia Department.

On 23 November soldiers from the XVII Brigade stopped a young girl from the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó at a checkpoint 10 minutes' walk from the community. With them was a man in a balaclava, believed to be a member of a local army-backed paramilitary group. He apparently told the soldiers that she was a guerrilla, and when she denied it one of the soldiers told her: "*No mienta. Toda la gente de por aquí es guerrillera. Esa Comunidad de Paz es pura guerrilla.*" ("Don't lie. Everyone around here is a guerrilla. The Peace Community is pure guerrilla.")

Later that day soldiers at another military checkpoint between San José de Apartadó and the community of La Unión (part of the Peace Community) reportedly detained a young boy and asked his name. They reportedly noted his name in a book and said, "*Estamos anotando estos nombres para tener toda la lista de los guerrilleros. Todo el mundo aquí es guerrillero.*" ("We're writing down these names to have a list of all the guerrillas. Everyone around here is a guerilla.")

On 5 December five soldiers reportedly entered the house of Rodrigo González a member of the Peace Community and ordered him to tell them the whereabouts of the guerrilla forces. They said that the Peace Community was a guerrilla community.

The paramilitary incursions in the Cacarica River Basin and the army accusations against the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó of being a guerrilla community raise serious concerns for the safety of these communities. Both these communities have called on both sides in the conflict to respect their right to life and their right as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict. The security forces and their paramilitary allies have repeatedly accused the

returning displaced communities of the Cacarica and San José de Apartadó of being linked to guerrilla forces, these accusations have left the civilian population exposed to continued threats and attacks.

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the recently returned displaced communities in the Cacarica River Basin area, and for the San José de Apartadó "Peace Communities" in Chocó, after paramilitary gunmen attacked the settlement of Villa Hermosa-La Raya;
- urging the authorities to take action to protect the communities, in line with the communities' own wishes;
- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Chocó, despite repeated government commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Chocó, with the results made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups brought to justice.

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

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 566 20 71

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente Pastrana / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gustavo Bell

Ministro de Defensa Nacional, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52, Oficina 217, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Fax: + 57 1 222 00 59

Salutation: Sr. Ministro Bell / Dear Minister Bell

Governor of Chocó Department

Sr. William Halaby Córdoba,

Gobernador del Departamento del Chocó, Gobernación del Chocó,
Quibdó, Chocó, Colombia

Telegram: Gobernador de Chocó, Quibdó, Colombia

Fax: + 57 4 971 1777

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador Córdoba / Dear Governor Córdoba

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz

AA 31861

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 22 January 2002.