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VENEZUELA

@Extrajudicial execution of two Wayúu indians

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Pedro José Paz, 21, and Násser Palmar, 22, Wayúu Indians, were shot dead by members of the security forces on 12 October 1992. The incident occurred during a visit by President Carlos Andrés Pérez to officially open the *Binacional* hospital in Paraguaipoa, a town with a large population of Wayúu Indians, in the western state of Zulia, near the Colombian border. The president's visit was arranged as part of the activities organized for the 500-year anniversary of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas.

The two men were travelling in a truck which reportedly crossed the path of the presidential convoy. One of the presidential guards ordered the men to stop and fired shots into the air. On hearing the shots, the driver of the truck accelerated. The guard fired at the truck which crashed into another vehicle. According to reports, a member of the security police, Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services (*Dirección de los Servicios de Inteligencia y Prevención, DISIP*), opened the door of the truck and fired at the two unarmed people several times. At the same time, other members of the presidential escort opened fire, wounding at least seven Wayúu Indians, most of them children.

Initial reports indicated that the president had been the subject of an assassination attempt. This version was subsequently amended. Instead, the authorities claimed that the two indians were drunk, that they had crashed through a barrier, run down several people and that the security forces had been obliged to act.

Shortly after the incident, a delegation, including members of the two families, travelled to Caracas to present their complaint to the Attorney General's Office (*Fiscalía*

*General de la República*¹). The families demanded material compensation in accordance with the custom and practice of the Wayúu Indians and for those responsible to be brought to justice. A commission was set up which included members of the families, human rights organizations, the church, the *fiscalía* and two representatives from the executive. At the time of the second meeting however, one of the government representatives, Dr. Yáñez Caballero, who had previously offered to head the commission, resigned, suspending the work of the commission.

There has been little progress in the investigations carried out by a local court. Four representatives (*fiscales*) from the Attorney General's Office and the representative responsible for indigenous affairs, Dra. Josefa Camargo, have been appointed to the case. Although they have called a number of people to testify, their investigations are still at a preliminary stage.

Sources indicate that there are about 150,000 indigenous people in Venezuela, speaking around 30 different languages. It is estimated that ten per cent of the indigenous population do not speak Spanish. The Wayúu live in the western part of Venezuela in the Guajira peninsula and in Colombia.

Amnesty International calls for a thorough and impartial investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Pedro José Paz and Násser Palmar and for those responsible to be brought to justice. The organization also calls for compensation for the relatives.

KEYWORDS: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES1 / EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION / CHILDREN / MILITARY / ANNIVERSARIES / INVESTIGATION OF ABUSES /

¹ The *Fiscalía General* through the Directorate of Human Rights (*Dirección de Derechos Humanos*) is responsible for safeguarding constitutional guarantees and for seeing that members of the security forces who violate the law are brought to justice.

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