

# amnesty international

## COLOMBIA

### KILLINGS OF NON-COMBATANT CIVILIANS IN PUERTO VALDIVIA, ANTIOQUIA DEPARTMENT

JULY 1990

SUMMARY

AI INDEX: AMR 23/29/90  
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Amnesty International is concerned at the killing of several non-combatant civilians in Puerto Valdivia, department of Antioquia, by the Colombian army in April 1990 following an armed confrontation in the region between guerrilla and regular army forces, in circumstances suggesting they were the victims of extrajudicial execution.

An official commission of inquiry was created to investigate the killing of the six peasants and on 4 May the commission, composed of members of the Procurator General's office, the Criminal Investigations department and the Judicial Police, travelled to Puerto Valdivia. Following the investigations, disciplinary proceedings (pliego de cargos) have been recommended against 11 members of the army implicated in the killings.

The majority of attacks on groups of non-combatant civilians in Colombia occur in rural areas placed under tight military control as a result of guerrilla activity. Some appear to be largely indiscriminate attacks against whole communities, targeted for their perceived (left-wing) political allegiances. However, in other cases the killing and "disappearance" of non-combatant civilians appear to be carried out in direct reprisal for guerrilla attacks against army personnel with the apparent intention of intimidating the civilian population.

This summarizes a 3-page document, COLOMBIA: Killings of non-combatant Civilians in Puerto Valdivia, Antioquia Department, AI Index: AMR further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document.

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JULY 1990

COLOMBIA: KILLINGS OF NON-COMBATANT CIVILIANS IN PUERTO VALDIVIA,  
ANTIOQUIA DEPARTMENT

Amnesty International is concerned at the killing of non-combatant civilians in Puerto Valdivia, department of Antioquia, by the Colombian army in April 1990 following an armed confrontation in the region between guerrilla and regular army forces.

On 17 April an armed confrontation took place in the Puerto Valdivia region of Antioquia department between members of the armed opposition group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas (FARC), Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, and members of the Girardot Battalion's Mobile Brigade, Brigada Móvil del Batallón Girardot, under the command of the IV Brigade, based in Medellín, capital of Antioquia. Two days later, on 19 April 1990, some six peasants from Puerto Valdivia were detained by members of the Girardot Battalion's Mobile Brigade, Brigada Móvil del Batallón Girardot, apparently on suspicion of having links with the FARC. On 23 April, the peasants' bodies were found in a common grave on a nearby farm called "La Esperanza" ("Hope"). The Commander of the army's IV Brigade told the press that the six peasants had died in combat. However, all the bodies had been tied and apparently they had been tortured prior to being shot. The names of four of the victims are known to Amnesty International: María Zenaída García Gómez, 32-year-old mother of six; Luz Elida Duque García, aged 22; Ramón Evelio Rua, aged 38 and Horacio Graciano, aged 34.

Over 1,000 peasants from the region staged a demonstration on 1 May in Puerto Valdivia to protest the killings. The demonstration was reportedly violently repressed and several demonstrators were injured. One peasant, Horacio Legarda, and one soldier were reportedly killed during the two-day protest, in which the peasants blocked the coastal road from Puerto Valdivia. The peasants were requesting a public inquiry into the killings, the exhumation of the six victims and guarantees for the safety of the survivors.

On 20 May Ricardo Henry Montenegro Paz, communist leader and president of Puerto Valdivia municipal council for the left-wing coalition Unión Patriótica (UP), was shot dead at his home in Puerto Valdivia by unidentified gunmen. Henry Montenegro had publicly denounced a number of apparently related killings in the region attributing them to the paramilitary group Muerte a Revolucionarios del Nordeste, (MRN), Death to Revolutionaries of the North East. He had received numerous death threats.

The paramilitary group Muerte a Revolucionarios del Nordeste (MRN) is one of over 140 paramilitary groups officially acknowledged to be operating in the country. Judicial and independent investigations have established that many such groups were created by and operate under the command of the Colombian armed forces.

### Investigations

An official commission of inquiry was created to investigate the killing of the six peasants in Puerto Valdivia and on 4 May the commission, composed of officials from the Procurator General's office, the Criminal Investigations department and the Judicial Police, travelled to Puerto Valdivia. During their initial visit to the region, including to the farm "La Esperanza" in order to take testimonies from witnesses, the area was reportedly subjected to aerial bombardments and the commission was forced to withdraw. According to recent press reports, following the Procurator General's investigations, disciplinary proceedings (pliego de cargos) have been recommended against 11 members of the army implicated in the killings, including two captains, two sergeants and a second lieutenant.

If the disciplinary proceedings establish the responsibility of members of armed forces under investigation, the Public Ministry can impose disciplinary sanctions (ranging from fines to dismissal) and can recommend that criminal proceedings be brought against those implicated. However, in the vast majority of cases known to Amnesty International, members of the armed forces identified by the Public Ministry as responsible for human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, have been acquitted or had charges against them dropped when their cases passed to the military courts.

Previous political killings in Puerto Valdivia include the following: On 17 December 1989 about 5 armed men reportedly arrived in Puerto Valdivia at midday and shot dead five people, among them three UP leaders. Their names are: Martín Gutiérrez, 40-year-old UP councillor; Gerardo Moncada, a chemist; Orlando David, a waiter; Luis Alvarez and Enrique Granada, both youths.

On 4 December 1988 a group of armed men arrived in Puerto Valdivia at about 8.00pm and began shooting at the towns people. Among the six victims were two active UP members, José Antonio Agudelo and Orlando de Jesús Pérez Gallego. The names of the other victims are: Benhur García, Rubén Moreno, Rodolfo León Usuga and Manuel Salvador Ladino. The numerous military posts and checkpoints on the road into Puerto Valdivia had reportedly been removed prior to the attack on the town.

The majority of attacks on groups of non-combatant civilians in Colombia occur in rural areas placed under tight military control as a result of guerrilla activity. Some massacres appear to be largely indiscriminate attacks against whole communities, targeted for their perceived political allegiances, often because UP and Communist Party candidates had been elected as mayors of municipal councils. However, in other cases multiple killings of non-combatant civilians appear to be carried out in direct reprisal for guerrilla attacks against army personnel with the apparent intention of intimidating the civilian population. In January and February of this year for example, the army reportedly responded to armed actions in the Magdalena Medio region on the part of the FARC and the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), Popular Liberation Army,

by targetting the civilian population with aerial bombardments, apparently as a means of intimidation. This has led to the enforced displacement of a large number of peasants to urban centres, such as Barrancabermeja.

At the end of April 1990 in Trujillo, Valle del Cauca department, over 16 people "disappeared" only days after the area was militarized following an ambush on an army patrol by members of the armed opposition group, Ejército de Liberación Nacional, (ELN), National Liberation Army. The local priest who had been assisting the relatives himself "disappeared" and his mutilated body was found a week later. People from Trujillo believe the "disappearances" were a direct reprisal aimed at intimidating the whole community. Following a Public Ministry investigation into the Trujillo four members of the Colombian armed forces have been called to testify.

Sporadic incidents of multiple killings registered in Colombia in recent years developed since 1988 into a widespread pattern of attacks on groups of non-combatant civilians which has left hundreds of people, including children, dead throughout the country. Motives for the wave of multiple killings appear to be diverse. Some incidents have no apparent political motivation and have been attributed to conflicts between rival criminal groups. Other multiple killings appear to have been instigated by would be landowners - often alleged drugs traffickers - with the intention of terrorizing peasant farmers into abandoning their homes and livestock. However, many of the multiple killings appear to have a clear political motivation and to form part of a systematic campaign of intimidation and elimination of perceived supporters of opposition parties.

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe, Procurator General from April 1988 to March 1989, stated that the killings are not "simple errors nor are they due to personal revenge. They have the characteristics of political crimes carried out to punish party adherences, ideological solidarity or to terrify entire communities with the objective of maintaining economic situations or impeding the growth of certain aspects of grassroots expression". ("No son equivocaciones, ni venganzas particulares. Los sucesos tienen todas las características de ser crímenes políticos cumplidos para castigar adhesiones partidistas, o solidaridades ideológicas, o para amedrentar comunidades enteras, en la idea de mantener situaciones económicas o de impedir el crecimiento de ciertas formas de expresión popular".)