

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 23/07/98

UA 41/98

Fear for safety / Disappearance

10 February 1998

COLOMBIAJaime Ignacio Díaz

Julio César Díaz Romero, son of Jaime Ignacio Díaz

On 22 January 1998, at 2 am, in the municipality of "Santa Helena del Opón", Santander Department, Jaime Ignacio Díaz was abducted at gunpoint from his home by members of a paramilitary group. His whereabouts remain unknown and there is grave concern for his safety. His son, who was threatened with his life by the gunmen, has since fled.

Around 25 heavily armed men, in military style uniform, reportedly abducted Jaime Ignacio Díaz. They are reported to have said to Jaime Ignacio Díaz: "*somos paramilitares y Ud. tiene que ir con nosotros por que le vamos a hacer un juicio por colaborador de la Guerrilla*", "We are paramilitaries and you've got to come with us because we are going to put you on trial for collaborating with the guerillas"

Julio César Díaz is now in Bucaramanga, the capital of the Department of Santander, where he went in order to inform the International Red Cross of the abduction. He is unable to return home for safety reasons.

The Díaz Romero family have been subject to repeated human rights violations in previous years. In 1994, the wife of Jaime Ignacio Díaz, Olimpia Romero, was killed by a soldier from a local army Battalion after she alleged the battalion was responsible for the theft of a cow. The soldier reportedly threatened to accuse her of guerrilla collaboration, shot her and then planted a gun on her body. He later successfully claimed her killing had been in self defence. In 1995, Juan Carlos Díaz, an older son of the couple, was detained and allegedly tortured by the security forces, forcing him to leave Colombia.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years Amnesty International has received numerous reports of human rights violations against the civilian population of Santander Department by paramilitary groups operating with the support of the armed forces. The civilian population has lodged numerous official complaints denouncing the close links between the armed forces and paramilitary groups. Guerrilla groups have also been responsible for frequent abuses of human rights in the area, including deliberate and arbitrary killings.

Despite repeated government pledges to protect human rights, members of the Colombian security forces together with their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. President Ernesto Samper Pizano has repeatedly promised to improve the human rights situation. His promises include a commitment to dismantle paramilitary forces. However, no effective steps have so far been taken to control their actions and to hold members accountable for serious and widespread human rights violations.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Jaime Ignacio Díaz whose whereabouts remain unknown since he was abducted by paramilitary gunmen on 22 January 1998;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into his "disappearance", for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;

- calling for the authorities to take appropriate measures to guarantee the physical safety of Julio César Díaz Romero;

If possible also:

- calling for full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the region, and for members of the security forces responsible for supporting such groups to be brought to justice;

- urging the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated governmental commitments.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No. 7-26
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 2186/289 3377/286 7434

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Alonso López Caballero
Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior
Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 6524/281 5884/286 0405

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gilberto Echeverri Mejía
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874 (if voice: me puede dar tono de fax por favor)

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Alternative Legal Association

MINGA, AA 40303, 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 24 March 1998.