

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 23/08/98

UA 43/98

Fear for Safety

11 February 1998

COLOMBIA Jesús Emilio TUBERQUIA

Ovidio Antonio TUBERQUIA (aged 16)] nephews of Jesús Arnulfo TUBERQUIA (aged
14)] TUBERQUIA

Joaquín GRACIANO

Residents of San José de Apartadó

There is serious concern for the safety of inhabitants of San José de Apartadó, municipality of Apartadó, in the northern region of the department of Antioquia, following an incident involving death threats against inhabitants of the community.

On 5 February 1998, the above-named peasant farmers, residents of San José de Apartadó, were reportedly confronted by a group of heavily-armed men in military uniform and were assaulted and threatened with death. The farmers were on their way to a nearby hamlet, La Unión, to harvest crops. According to information received, the unidentified gunmen forced the peasants to remove their shirts then threatened them with decapitation, holding machetes at their throats. They then threatened to turn up in the community of San José de Apartadó because: "*allí se la pasan milicianos de la guerrilla y la población le vende mercados a la insurgencia*", "there guerrilla militias pass by and the population sells goods to insurgents".

The armed men are believed to be members of army-backed paramilitary groups operating in the region. In the past those labelled guerrilla sympathizers or collaborators by the security forces or their paramilitary allies have frequently been the target of serious human rights violations.

In March 1997, San José de Apartadó declared itself to be a *Comunidad de Paz*, Peace Community, in an attempt to persuade the warring parties to respect their neutrality and right to life. Since the declaration, over 30 inhabitants have been killed and two "disappeared" (see UA 393/97, AMR 23/85/97, 16 December 1997 and follow-up AMR 23/85/97, 16 December 1997), the majority by army-backed paramilitary groups but several others by members of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, guerrilla group.

In recent months the Colombian Government has renewed commitments to take action to dismantle paramilitary groups but, despite appeals on behalf of the inhabitants of San José de Apartadó, no effective action has been taken to confront paramilitary groups operating in the area of this community. This is despite a heavy presence by the Colombian Army in the region.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members of the Colombian army and security forces, together with their paramilitary allies, continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity.

Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups, in many areas of the country they continue to work with the support of the security forces. President Ernesto Samper Pizano has made repeated promises to improve the human rights situation and to dismantle paramilitary

forces. However, no steps have been taken to control their actions and to hold members accountable for serious and widespread human rights violations.

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

- calling for full and impartial investigations into the assaults and threats against Jesús Emilio Tuberquia, Ovidio Antonio Tuberquia, Arnulfo Tuberquio and Joaquín Graciano on 5 February 1998 by a group of unidentified armed men believed to be members of paramilitary forces operating with the support of the security forces and for the results to be made public and those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of all the residents of the community of San José de Apartadó;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation 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 to 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, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

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

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper

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 Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Governor of Antioquia

Dr. Alberto Builes Ortega
 Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia, Gobernación de Antioquia
 Calle 42B, # 52-106, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador del Departamento, Antioquia, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 4 381 1342

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

In appeals to the Governor of Antioquia, acknowledge that although guerrilla forces in Colombian have violated international humanitarian law this in no way justifies human rights violations by the Colombian security forces and their paramilitary allies.

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz, AA 31861, Santafé de Bogotá

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 25 March 1998.