

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/018/2002

8 February 2002

Further information on UA 136/01 (AMR 23/55/2001, 4 June 2001) and follow-up (AMR 23/124/01, 11 December 2001) - Fear for Safety

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

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the Afro-Colombian civilian communities of the Cacarica River Basin (Cuenca del Cacarica) in the department of Chocó and the indigenous communities living in the same area, who have received reports that they may be facing an imminent paramilitary incursion.

On 8 February, a large number of armed men thought to be paramilitaries were reported to be heading towards two resettlement communities at Esperanza en Dios and Nueva Vida. They were coming from a paramilitary base reportedly situated in San José de la Balsa, south of the Cacarica River Basin. Amnesty International has condemned the establishment of the reported base in recent years, yet no decisive action has been taken by the authorities to dismantle it. They have also failed to confront paramilitaries in the area, who continue to operate despite a heavy-military presence.

Concern for the safety of the indigenous communities living in the region and inhabitants of the returned Afro-Colombian communities of the Cacarica River Basin has been heightened by reports that they have been ordered by the paramilitaries to attend a meeting at the paramilitary base in San José de la Balsa on 9 February.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years many of the inhabitants of the communities in the Cacarica River Basin area have returned to their lands after they were forced to flee their homes in the wake of joint paramilitary-military operations in the region in early 1997. During their forced displacement, the communities of the Cacarica River Basin were frequently subjected to death threats and human rights violations committed by army-backed paramilitaries. These often took place after they were labelled guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. During the process of return, several members of the communities have been killed and "disappeared", including community leader Freddy Gallego (see UA 240/00, AMR 23/058/00, 14 August 2000 and follow-ups). The communities have also faced repeated threats made by paramilitary forces who have been able to enter the Cacarica River Basin despite the fact the area is heavily-militarized and despite repeated alerts to the Colombian security forces of the presence of paramilitary forces. (See UA 136/01, AMR 23/055/2001, 4 June 2001 and for more details on the forcibly displaced communities of Chocó Department see AI report: Colombia: Return to Hope, AMR 23/23/00, June 2000). Armed opposition groups have also been responsible for threats and killings against members of returned displaced communities in Chocó Department.

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the returned displaced communities in the Cacarica River Basin area and indigenous communities living

in the same area in the light of reports of a heavy paramilitary presence in the region and threats of an imminent paramilitary incursion;

- urging the authorities to take all measures that the communities themselves deem appropriate to guarantee their safety;

- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Chocó, despite repeated 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, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;

- urging the authorities to take immediate and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Presidente de la República, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 336 2109 /337 1351/284 2186/566 2071

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gustavo Bell

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 288 4906/ 286 4126 / 281 1213 / 222 1874

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

Commander of the XVII Brigade of the Colombian Army

General Pablo Rodríguez Laverde

Carepa, Urabá, Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante XVII Brigada, Carepa, Urabá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 4 823 6601/823 6844/823 6605/823 6796/823 6601

Salutation: Dear Commander/Sr Comandanta

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz

AA 31861, 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 March 2002.