

£COLOMBIA

@The Killings of Rosalba Camacho and family

Rosalba Camacho, aged 60
Martín Vásquez, aged 62
Elizabeth Vásquez Camacho, aged 28
Josefina Vásquez Camacho, aged 24
Idali Vásquez Camacho, aged 16
Adriana, (surname not known), aged 10

Amnesty International is concerned at the killing of Rosalba Camacho, her husband, Martín Vásquez, three of their children, Elizabeth, Josefina and Idali Vásquez Camacho, and a granddaughter, Adriana, on 22/3 February 1991 in the farming community of Montoso, municipality of Prado, in southern Tolima department, in circumstances suggesting they may have been the victims of extrajudicial execution.

On the morning of 23 February the bodies of Rosalba Camacho and her family were found by a neighbour who went to their home. According to reports their throats had been slit and their faces disfigured. The previous night, 22 February 1991, a group of unidentified armed men had reportedly entered their home and carried out a search as Rosalba Camacho together with her family were watching a football match on television.

Reports indicate that army personnel from Montoso military base (base militar) had left their base just one week prior to the killing, although mourners at the funeral of Rosalba Camacho and her family as well as police spokesmen claim to have seen an army truck in Prado that day. According to reports, the military base is stationed in Montoso in order to control armed opposition groups active in the area. Members of the UP in the region are reportedly searched and questioned by army personnel with frequency.

Rosalba Camacho was a member of the Communist party of Colombia, (Partido Comunista Colombiano), and the left-wing coalition opposition group Patriotic Union, Unión Patriótica, (UP), both legal organizations in Colombia. She is a former councillor representing the Communist party on the municipal council of Prado and was President of the Montoso Peasants' Cooperative, Cooperativa de Campesinos de Montoso, whose head office (Cooperative de Trabajadores Agrícolas, COAGROTAL Ltda.) is situated only a few metres from the military base.

Apparently as a result of her role as a leading opposition activist Rosalba Camacho and her family had repeatedly been threatened by an army lieutenant, the commander of

Montoso military base. In June 1989 Rosalba Camacho was summoned by the commander of Montoso military base and was reportedly warned to leave the region or face death. National press reports indicate that army officials had claimed that the Peasants' Cooperative was run by guerrillas, ("una empresa de guerrilleros"). Following the summons and threat made by the Commander of the military base, Rosalba Camacho had to report to the military base every four days, and then every day. Amnesty International has no further details about the possible reasons for this, nor does the organization have confirmation as to whether this continued to the time of her death.

In June 1990 two of Rosalba Camacho's sons, Roger and Sebastián, also Communist Party and UP members, were killed by paramilitary groups in separate incidents. Amnesty International has no further information about the circumstances of their deaths, nor about the progress of any investigations initiated. Another of her sons, Rubén, was reportedly detained and tortured by members of the army in 1989 before being released. His ill-treatment was denounced to the regional procurator, procurador regional. Amnesty International has no further information about the charges against him, nor about any investigation into the treatment to which he was subjected.

The Procurator General's office (Procuraduría General de la Nación) has opened an investigation into the killing of Rosalba Camacho and her family. The Public Ministry's role - as defined by the Constitution - is to supervise the official conduct of public officials and to prosecute "offences and contraventions that upset the social order" (Constitution, art. 143). Under recent Procurator Generals important steps have been taken towards improving the processing of complaints and the investigation of alleged human rights violations. However, the penalties which the Public Ministry can impose on those responsible for abuses are limited to disciplinary sanctions which range from fines or suspension from duty to requesting the dismissal from the armed forces of officials. Once sanctions have been imposed on a member of the armed forces or other state agents for human rights violations, the Public Ministry passes the case to the judicial authorities for criminal prosecution.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Both the Colombian Communist party and the UP have been particular targets for death threats, politically motivated killings and "disappearances" in recent years. It is a legally recognized political movement which has participated in presidential, congressional and municipal elections. Since its creation in 1985 the UP claims that over 1,500 of its members, (over 80 during 1990), have been victims of politically motivated killings, including grassroots activists, local councillors, congress members and national leaders. The UP's presidential candidate in the 1986 presidential elections, a university lecturer and former judge, Jaime Pardo Leal, was shot in October 1987 as he was travelling with his wife and bodyguard when their car was intercepted by three armed men. He died shortly after reaching hospital. The UP's candidate for the 1990 presidential elections, Bernardo

Jaramillo Ossa, was shot dead in Bogota's main airport on 22 March 1990 by a 15-year-old youth armed with a sub-machine gun who was able to enter the airport unhindered despite the presence of numerous security guards.

Responsibility for such abuses has been attributed by the Colombian Government to right-wing paramilitary groups and "death squads", groups of civilians which the government claims it can neither identify nor control. However, there is strong evidence indicating that such groups are operating on the authority or with the acquiescence of the armed forces.

Leaders of the UP, including Jaime Pardo and Bernardo Jaramillo, have repeatedly denounced the involvement of the Colombian armed forces in the killings and "disappearance" of its members, however, in the vast majority of cases those responsible for the killings have not been brought to justice. The current leader of the UP, Carlos Romero, in a letter to the Minister of the Interior (Ministro de Gobierno) and dated 4 March 1991 accused army personnel of having links with paramilitary forces of participating in organized crimes against UP members. According to the UP over 50 of its members have already been killed since the beginning of 1991, and 13 have "disappeared".