

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/19/98

2 April 1998

Further information on UA 52/98 (AMR 23/09/98, 17 February 1998) - Fear for safety / Extrajudicial execution / "Disappearance"

**COLOMBIAN** Néstor Héctor Hernández Iglesias, Mayor  
Inhabitants of Puerto Asís and surrounding area

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There is continued concern for the safety of the residents of Puerto Asís, department of Putumayo, particularly for the mayor of the town, Néstor Hector Hernández Iglesias, as the civilian community reportedly continues to suffer attacks by paramilitary groups.

Recent reports indicate that as many as 100 people have been killed in the area since the end of January 1998, following the arrival of up to 300 paramilitary gunmen. Using a "black list" of 250 intended victims, the gunmen began to selectively kill members of the community. Many of the victims are believed to have been tortured before being killed.

At the beginning of February, Néstor Héctor Hernández Iglesias went to the capital, Bogotá, where he publicly denounced the killings to the authorities. He also alleged that the paramilitary forces arrived in the town in Colombian Army helicopters. The Ministry of Defence has denied any complicity on the part of the armed forces in the attacks.

Those denouncing links between paramilitary groups and the armed forces have in the past often been subjected to intimidation, attack or extrajudicial execution. On returning to Puerto Asís, the Colombian authorities provided Néstor Héctor Hernández Iglesias with 22 bodyguards. On 18 February he narrowly escaped a bomb attack on his home.

Official investigators sent by to the Puerto Asís area to investigate the on-going killings were reportedly forced to flee the town on 3 March after receiving death threats from a paramilitary group called *Las Autodefensas del Sur*, Southern Self-defence Forces. The continued killings and general climate of fear have meant that many inhabitants of the town and surrounding area have also fled in search of safety.

Reports also indicate that members of the armed opposition group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, have arbitrarily killed at least 10 residents of Valle del Guamuez (also known as La Hormiga), a municipality neighbouring that of Puerto Asís. The victims were apparently accused of collaborating with paramilitary groups.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The FARC has long had a strong presence in the southern jungle department of Putumayo. During a summit in 1996 paramilitary leaders stated their intention of attacking the FARC stronghold of Putumayo. Residents of the department reported the arrival of paramilitary gunmen in 1997. Security force officials have however repeatedly denied that there has been any increase in paramilitary violence in the area, declaring that such claims are guerrilla propaganda. Since December 1997 the Putumayo area has been heavily militarized by the Colombian army, after 18 soldiers were taken hostage by the FARC.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian population of Puerto Asís and surrounding area, particularly Nestor Hector Hernández;
- calling on the authorities to take all measures to ensure the safety of those at risk;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into all killings of inhabitants of the region by paramilitary gunmen, for the results to be made public and for those responsible be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the area and urging that any members of the security forces found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups 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**

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez  
 Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación  
 Diagonal 22B 5201, Apartado Aéreo 29855  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Faxes: + 571 570 2000 (ext 2017 - when ansaphone picks up dial 2017 for fax)**

**Salutation: Estimado Dr. / Dear Dr.**

**COPIES TO:**

Governmental: Advocate for the People:

Dr. José Fernando Castro Caycedo  
 Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo, Calle 55 No. 10-32  
 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 15 May 1998.