

UA 81/00

Fear for

COLOMBIA Peasant farmer and community leaders in the municipality of Yondó and the Cimitarra River Valley region

During March 2000, at least seven people are reported to have been killed by paramilitaries belonging to the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia in the municipality of Yondó, department of Antioquia and the Cimitarra River Valley region of the departments of Antioquia and Bolívar.

Amnesty International is concerned that the failure of the authorities to take action against paramilitary forces in the area is putting civilians and peasant farmer and community leaders at great risk of further attacks.

31 March - Diomedes Playonero Ortiz, a member of the Executive Committee of the *Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra* (ACVC), Peasant Farmer Association of the Cimitarra River Valley, was reportedly shot in the head after some 50 AUC members surrounded his farm. The AUC reportedly said they killed him because he was a "sapo y guerrillero", "a guerrilla informer and a guerrilla" - those accused of being guerrilla sympathizers or collaborators by the security forces or their paramilitary auxiliaries are often victim to serious human rights violations. In December 1999 Amnesty International denounced reports that the Colombian Army had called peasant farmer leaders belonging to the ACVC "secuestradores", "kidnappers" (see UA 326/99, AMR 23/93/99, 29 December 1999). Such accusations are often synonymous with accusations of being a guerrilla sympathizer.

30 March: labourers Prospero Lagares and Edison Bueno were reportedly killed by paramilitaries as they worked in the La Ganadera Farm, municipality of Yondó.

26 March: Julio César Jiménez and Aldemar Roa Córdoba were reportedly killed by AUC forces in the community of San Tropel, municipality of Yondó.

24 March: José Joaquín Ballestas García, president of the *Junta de Accion Comunal*, the community council of Ciénaga de Barbacoas, was also reportedly shot in the head in Ciénaga de Barbacoas, municipality of Yondó.

24 March: Hernando Stevens Vanegas was reportedly abducted at an AUC checkpoint and killed. Although the checkpoint was set up throughout the day close to the *Armada Fluvial de Barrancabermeja*, Barrancabermeja Naval Base, in an area known as "La Rompida", security forces took no action to stop them. Witnesses later reportedly claimed that they had recognized members of the Colombian Navy amongst men on the checkpoint.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. In the last five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. The Colombian government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989, yet they continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

Guerrilla forces have also committed serious violations of international humanitarian law including executing those they accuse of being security force or paramilitary force collaborators.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of communities, particularly community and peasant farmer leaders in the municipality of Yondó, after at least seven paramilitary killings in March 2000;
- urging that all measures deemed appropriate by those under threat are taken to guarantee the safety of the civilian population in the Municipality of Yondó, particularly ACVC members;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the reported killings by paramilitary forces of Diomedes Playonero Ortiz, José Joaquín Ballestas García, Hernando Stevens Vanegas, Julio César Jiménez, Aldemar Roa Córdoba, Prospero Lagares and Edison Bueno, for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the municipality of Yondó, department of Antioquia and neighbouring areas, urging that the results are made public and those 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 government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO: (if you have trouble getting a fax tone please try later):

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434 / 284 2186 / 337 1351

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Néstor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No. 8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5584 / 342 3201 / 341 9739

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña, 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

COPIES TO:

Regional Non-governmental Human Rights Organization
CREDHOS, AA 505, Barrancabermeja, Santander, 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 May 2000.