

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 23/35/92

Distr: UA/SC

UA 205/92

Extrajudicial execution/Torture

19 June 1992

COLOMBIA:

José Delfín TORRES CASTRO

Rafael BASTO OLIVARES

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at the circumstances surrounding the killing of Rafael Basto Olivares, a police inspector, and his secretary José Delfín Torres Castro, in the García Rovira region of Santander department by members of the army.

According to reports, the killings took place on 9 June 1992 in Tabeta, municipality of Cerrito, department of Santander, as local peasants were leaving Tabeta at the end of market day. A military patrol from the García Rovira Battalion, under the command of Colonel Plinio Rodríguez, set up a control post (retén) at a place called Alto de las Cruces on the road leading out of Tabeta. All the peasants' vehicles were forced to stop, ostensibly to allow a group of soldiers to pass. Rafael Basto, José Delfín Torres and several peasants arrived at the control post in the Police Inspector's van. The patrol, consisting of about 12 soldiers, seized José Delfín Torres and separated him from the peasants. He was reportedly tortured under interrogation during two hours before being returned to the Police Inspector's van. The soldiers then drove José Delfín Torres and Rafael Basto away in his van. Five minutes later shots were heard. Rafael Basto was dead and José Delfín Torres was seriously wounded. He died before arriving at a hospital.

Rafael Basto was the police inspector Inspector de Policía for Tabeta. Police inspectors are civilian lawyers whose basic legal functions do not require the immediate intervention of a judge. José Delfín Torres was his secretary, which is also a civilian post. José Delfín Torres' wife, Irma Vera, was killed on 5 February 1987, allegedly by troops from the García Rovira Battalion who had accused her and another person, Mauricio Castro, of belonging to a guerrilla group. Since her death, José Delfín Torres had received death threats. He had collaborated with a local human rights group, Comité de Solidaridad y Derechos Humanos de García Rovira.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years Amnesty International has received many reports of human rights violations in the García Rovira region, including torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution by the Colombian army against members of the civilian population, including human rights workers, who are apparently perceived as potential collaborators of the armed opposition group National Liberation Army, Ejército de Liberación Nacional, (ELN). The region was militarized at the beginning of March 1992 and peasant families from the region have since denounced constant harassment of the civilian population by troops from the Batallón García Rovira. In early May 1992 peace talks between the government and the guerrilla groups were suspended and since then fighting has increased in many parts of the country. The army has responded with a large scale counter-insurgency crackdown, leading to numerous reports of human rights violations against the civilian population.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the killing of Rafael Basto Olivares and the torture

and killing of José Delfín Torres reportedly by the Colombian army in circumstances suggesting they were extrajudicially executed;
- requesting there be an immediate independent investigation into the killings in order to bring those responsible to justice, the results of which should be made public;
- urging that all the necessary measures be taken immediately to ensure the safety of all those involved in the defence of human rights in Colombia.

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APPEALS TO:

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 3066; + 57 1 286 7324; + 57 1 287 7937

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/ Dear President Gaviria

2) Procurator General:

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta Padilla
Procurador General de la Nación
Procuraduría General
Edificio Banco Ganadero
Carrera 5, No. 15-80
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 41224 PRGEN CO; 41213 PGNDP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 0472

Salutation: Sr. Procurador de la Nación / Dear Dr. Arrieta

3) Minister of Defence

Dr. Rafael Pardo Rueda
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa Pardo Rueda, Santa Fe de Bogota, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

4) Coronel Plinio Rodríguez

Comandante
Batallón García Rovira
Pamplona
Santander, Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante Batallón García Rovira, Pamplona, Santander, Colombia

Salutation: Sr. Comandante / Dear Sir

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Señores
CINEP
Apartado Aéreo
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 July 1992.