

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

COLOMBIA

Population of Curumaní municipality, Cesar Department

At least 22 peasant farmers were reportedly killed by army-backed paramilitaries on 4 and 5 December, in the municipality of Curumaní, Cesar department. The local civilian population are believed to be in grave danger.

Around 200 gunmen who said they were members of the paramilitary group *Bloque Norte*, North Bloc, went into the communities of La Más Verde and Nuevo Horizonte in the Santa Isabel area of Curumaní. They reportedly abducted at least 22 civilians, whom they tortured and then killed by either stabbing or shooting them.

Among the first bodies to be identified were those of peasant farmers Carlos Julio Hernández Triana, Elidez Ramírez Pineda and Héctor Julio Manzano. They were taken to the municipal capital, Curumaní, along with two other bodies which had not been identified. The bodies of 17 people were left abandoned in La Más Verde y Nuevo Horizonte for at least five days.

The Curumaní area is heavily militarized, but despite the fact that the paramilitaries remained at least two days in the area the security forces made no apparent effort to confront the paramilitaries. This raises still greater concern for the safety of the civilian population. The Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, the *Defensoría del Pueblo*, had reportedly issued an alert warning of a paramilitary threat to attack communities in the municipality of Curumaní in October.

The *Bloque Norte* has been implicated in other serious human rights violations over the last year despite its involvement in a government-sponsored process supposedly aimed at demobilizing paramilitary groups. On 23 December 2004, members of the *Bloque Norte* reportedly set up an illegal checkpoint between the municipal capital of Convención and Cartagenita where they reportedly abducted and subsequently killed Jesús Humberto Guerrero Jiménez and a youth whose identity remains unknown. On 25 December Leonel Bayona Cabrales, Samuel Pérez and Custodio Melo, William Montaña and five other peasant farmers whose names are unknown were killed in the area. These killings took place shortly after the 10 December demobilization of the *Bloque Catatumbo* a segment of the *Bloque Norte*. Although the 10 December demobilization was not intended to involve the entire *Bloque Norte*, the killings highlighted how the paramilitary group was still militarily active. In October a *Bloque Norte* commander met with the government's *Alto Comisionado por la Paz*, High Commissioner for Peace, Luis Carlos Restrepo, and reaffirmed the *Bloque Norte's* intention to demobilize.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The present government of President Alvaro Uribe Vélez has been engaged in a process of dialogue with army-backed paramilitary groups. The main paramilitary umbrella organization, the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, declared a ceasefire in December 2002, but since then over 2,300 people have "disappeared" or been killed. Amnesty International is still documenting paramilitary human rights violations in areas where paramilitary units have supposedly demobilized, carried out in collusion with the security forces. Paramilitaries often kill those they label guerrilla collaborators; similarly guerrilla forces have killed numerous civilians they accuse of siding with their enemies.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian population of the municipality of Curumaní, where 22 peasant farmers were killed by army-backed paramilitaries on 4 and 5 December;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the killings, for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice,
- calling on the authorities to reveal what steps they are taking to protect the civilian population in the area;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups in the department of Cesar, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 337 5890

Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe/ Dear President Uribe

High Commissioner for Peace

Alto Comisionado Para la Paz

Dr. Luis Carlos Restrepo

Casa de Nariño - Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 560 9946

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Restrepo/ Dear Dr. Restrepo

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,

Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)

Salutation: Dear Dr. Iguarán / Estimado Dr. Iguarán

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental human rights organization

MINGA

Calle 19 # 5-88, oficina 1203

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 23 January 2006.