

UA 172/99 Fear for Safety/"Disappearance"/Extrajudicial Execution

21 July 1999

**COLOMBIA**Killed: Juan de Dios Mesa, Atilano Rodríguez Moreno, Francisco Frankin Pérez, Ender Leonardo Avendaño Pinedo, Luis Alfredo Guerrero Garcia, Néelson Rodríguez Mogollón, Henry Alonso Soto Suárez, Marcelino Arenas Caicedo, Luis Alberto Lara Pérez and 5 others.  
**"Disappeared": Possibly up to 30 people**

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the civilian population of Tibú, Norte de Santander department, after a uniformed paramilitary force entered the town on 17 July 1999, killing 14 people and abducting up to 30 others.

A paramilitary force of 20 to 50 men entered the town at approximately 10pm. The gunmen identified themselves as members of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. They went into a bar in the centre of Tibú, selected their victims from a list of names, and ordered them to go and lie face down on the ground outside the bar. The paramilitaries shot and killed seven of them, reportedly telling those present, "*vinimos para quedarnos y ya estamos bien instalados*" (we came to stay and now we're well installed).

The group went on to abduct up to 30 people, whom they took away in trucks in the direction of La Gabarra. The bodies of seven of them were found on the road between Tibú and La Gabarra the following day. La Gabarra is reported to be practically deserted since paramilitaries killed 25 people there at the end of May 1999 (See UA 125/99, 2 June 1999, AMR 23/44/99). There is believed to be a paramilitary base in the region.

According to inhabitants of Tibú, members of the AUC, which is commanded by national paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño, have been seen in the company of members of the state security forces. Although there is a police station and an army barracks (Batallón de Contraquerilla No 46, Héroes de Saraguru) in the centre of Tibú, no attempt was made to prevent the paramilitary force carrying out this attack.

On 20 July a regional paramilitary commander known as "Camilo" announced to a commission of state officials visiting Norte de Santander department that executions of suspected guerillas and their supporters would continue. The commission included representatives of the *Procuraduría Regional*, Regional Procurator, *Defensoría del Pueblo*, the People's Defender, and the *Vicepresidencia*, Vice-President. At least 60 people have been killed by paramilitaries in the region in the last two months.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The start of the paramilitary offensive around La Gabarra created thousands of refugees, many of whom fled across the border into Venezuela (See EXTRA 80/99, 1 July 1999, AMR 53/06/99).

Peasant communities in disputed zones in Colombia's long-running civil conflict have frequently suffered human rights violations. Neither the armed forces and their paramilitary allies nor the left-wing armed opposition groups recognize the civilian population's neutrality in the conflict.

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Over the

past five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. 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.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the civilian population of the municipality of Tibú, Norte de Santander department;
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of the inhabitants;
- calling for prompt, full and impartial investigations into the reported killings and abductions carried out in Tibú by a paramilitary force on 17 July 1999;
- urging that the authorities take all appropriate measures to establish the whereabouts, guarantee the safety and secure the release of the "disappeared";
- urging that the results of the investigations be made public and that the perpetrators be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the municipality of Tibú and urging that 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.

**APPEALS TO:**

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 1 284 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: Ministerio del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister**

Commander of the Army

General Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel, Comandante del Ejército Nacional

Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Comandante del Ejercito, Bogota, Colombia**

**Salutation: Sr. Comandante/Dear Commander**

**Faxes: + 57 1 315 1570**

**COPIES TO:**

Alternative Legal Association,

MINGA, AA 40303, 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 1 September 1999.