

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/062/2001

UA 147/01

Fear for Safety

13 June 2001

COLOMBIA Indigenous communities of Pueblo Viejo, La Robada, Tres Cruces, Cambia and Los Chancos y El Salado in the Nuestra Señora Candelaria de la Montaña reservation, Caldas department

Paramilitaries have threatened indigenous families living in a reservation (*resguardo*) in the central Department of Caldas, forcing them to flee their homes. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety and for that of other indigenous communities in the area.

On 7 June, a group of paramilitaries belonging to the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, reportedly ordered 13 families living in the community of El Salado in the Nuestra Señora Candelaria de la Montaña reservation to leave their homes by the next day. The families fled to the municipal capital of Riosucio.

Paramilitary gunmen have also ordered other indigenous communities in the area, including Pueblo Viejo, La Robada, Tres Cruces, Cambia and Los Chancos y El Salado, to leave. Since 5 June, they have set up illegal checkpoints and have controlled the movement of the civilian population. They have threatened to kill those who do not show their identity documents.

Indigenous communities have informed the Colombian authorities of the paramilitary presence. However, although troops with the Ayacucho and Quimbaya battalions of the VIII Brigade of the Colombian Army have reportedly been stationed in the municipalities of Riosucio and Supía for the last month, the authorities have reportedly failed to take effective action to protect the indigenous population, and paramilitary forces have apparently been able to operate unhindered in the area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The security forces and their paramilitary allies have frequently committed serious human rights violations against peasant, black and indigenous communities living in conflict areas. Such violations are committed with virtual impunity. In the last five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. Guerrilla forces have also carried out numerous killings and other violations of international humanitarian law against peasant, black and indigenous communities.

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 - by action or omission - in many areas of the country.

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the indigenous communities named above, whom paramilitaries have ordered to leave;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective measures to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that the government and security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the Department of Caldas,

despite repeated commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle such groups;

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the Department of Caldas, with the results made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups brought to justice;

- urging the authorities to take immediate and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and UN recommendations.

APPEALS TO (Colombian fax numbers can be difficult to reach. Please be patient and keep trying):

President of the Republic

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

Faxes: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Minister of Interior

Sr. Armando Estrada Villa
Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior
Palacio Echeverry
Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 341 9583 / 334 3960 / 286 8025 / 342 3201 / 281 5884

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

Governor of the Department of Caldas

Sr. Luis Alfonso Arias Aristizábal
Gobernación de Caldas
Carrera 21, Calle 22 y 23
Manizales, Caldas, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 68 842204

Salutation : Dear Governor / Estimado Gobernador

COPIES TO:

National Indigenous Organization

ONIC
AA 32395
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 25 July 2001.