

UA 246/95

Extrajudicial Execution /
Fear for Safety

26 October 1995

COLOMBIA José Vicente Rueda (killed)
Civilians in the Magdalena Medio region

There are serious fears for the safety of at least ten civilian families living in the hamlets of Danto Bajo and Plazuela in the jurisdiction of San Vicente Chucurí, Magdalena Medio region of Santander Department, following reports of human rights violations perpetrated by a paramilitary group "Los Masetos".

These abuses were allegedly carried out with the complicity of the *Luciano D'Luyer* battalion, belonging to the II Division of the Colombian army, and include the reported extrajudicial execution of José Vicente Rueda and the intimidation of other local people.

On 17 October 1995, nine armed men, wearing uniforms used by the Colombian armed forces and identifying themselves as "Los Masetos", stopped José Vicente Rueda and his 12-year-old son as they were on their way to cut wood. They forced José Vicente Rueda to lie face-down on the ground while they tied his arms together. They then forced him to get up and walk; they accused him of knowing the whereabouts of guerrillas in the area. When José Vicente Rueda's wife, unaware of what was happening, called her husband and son to lunch, the paramilitaries told them "*que no gritaran porque sino los degollaban*", "do not scream because if you do we will cut your throats". José Vicente Rueda was eventually allowed to go, after his captors had told him that if they saw him in the street they would kill him. His son was also released.

On 18 October, José Vicente Rueda went to Barrancabermeja to report the above incident. The following day, at 8.30am, when José Vicente Rueda and his two sons were in a shop in Danto Bajo, "Los Masetos" arrived and intimidated the people who were there. They were the same men who had kidnapped and tortured him two days earlier. The men closed the door and made a list of everyone in the shop and then, one by one, allowed them to leave, except for José Vicente Rueda. He was killed at about 4pm and his body thrown into a field. Before the crime, the children of José Vicente Rueda were forced out of the place because "*sino los mataban*," "if not they would kill them".

It has been reported that, apart from this latest killing, several other people from the same area, including Victor Julio Gómez, Luis Alfredo Quintero and Fernando Velázquez, were killed by the same paramilitary group, acting with the complicity of the *Luciano D'Luyer* battalion. The files on these cases are still in the possession of the relevant state authorities, awaiting investigation. Amnesty International has not received any information concerning the manner and circumstances of these deaths.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite repeated government pledges to protect human rights, members of the Colombian army and security forces, together with their paramilitary allies, continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Many paramilitary groups have their origins in the civilian "self-defence" squads which the army created in the 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombia armed forces to combat

and disband such groups, paramilitary forces have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents with impunity in many areas of the country and continue to work with the support of the security forces. President Ernesto Samper Pizano, who took office on 7 August 1994, has made repeated promises, both during his election campaign and since taking office, to improve the human rights situation. His promises include a commitment to dismantle paramilitary forces. To date, however, such forces continue to act with impunity.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the residents in Danto Bajo and Plazuela hamlets (San Vicente Chucurí jurisdiction), Magdalena Medio region, Santander Department;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the alleged extrajudicial execution by members of the paramilitary group "Los Masetos" of José Vicente Rueda on 19 October 1995, and calling for the results to be made public and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice;
- urging that allegations of human rights abuses in the Danto Bajo and Plazuela be immediately and fully investigated;
- repeating calls for the government to immediately fulfil its commitment to disband paramilitary forces presently operating as auxiliaries of or with the complicity of the armed forces, and for any members of such groups found responsible for human rights abuses to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of Colombia

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia

Tx: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 289 3377/286 7434

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper

2) Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento
 Fiscal General de la Nación
 Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá
 Colombia

Telegrams:Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalia General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes:+ 57 1 245 5292 or 287 0939 or 288 2828

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso

3) Minister of the Interior

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe
 Ministro del Interior
 Ministerio del Interior
 Carrera 8a, No.8-09, Piso 7
 Santafé de Bogotá
 COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior Serpa, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister
Fax: + 57 1 286 65 24/ 286 00 53/ 286 04 85 (provisional)

4) Minister of Defence

Dr. Juan Carlos Esguerra Portocarrero
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
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Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa , Bogota, Colombia
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Fax: + 57 1 222 1874/288 4906/228 1874
Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

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 7 December 1995.