

UA 03/02

Fea.

COLOMBIA Inhabitants of the returned displaced *Comunidad de Vida y Trabajo La Balsita*, Community of Life and Work La Balsita

Following a paramilitary incursion into the municipality of Dabeiba, Antioquia Department on 25 December 2001, close to 100 armed men claiming to be members of the paramilitary group, *Autodefensas Unidas de Córdoba y Urabá*, United Self-Defence Force of Córdoba and Urabá, reportedly invaded the nearby *Comunidad de Vida y Trabajo* on 31 December 2001. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the civilian population in the area.

Of the 100 men, 50 reportedly dispersed throughout the settlement. The other 50 reportedly gathered members of the community and other civilians passing by the settlement in the main house to tell them that the paramilitaries had taken control of the area surrounding Dabeiba because there were a lot of guerrillas in the area, "*Hemos venido a hacer control a todos los alrededores de Dabeiba porque aquí hay mucha guerrilla*".

The paramilitaries reportedly accused members of the community of allowing guerrillas to set up tents in the area and of having guerrilla propaganda in the main house. The inhabitants reportedly explained that the tents belonged to the community, that the guerrillas had not made any presence known and that the documents were for training and educating community members. The paramilitaries reportedly seized the documents, stating that their commanders would have to study them. They also set up their own tents and were able to remain in the community until 2 January despite the reported presence of the IV and XVII Brigades of the army in Dabeiba, 20 minutes away. The paramilitaries reportedly remain nearby, raising concerns for the safety of the civilian population.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the wake of a five-day paramilitary incursion in 1997, during which approximately 30 people were killed, more than 1,200 people were forcibly displaced from the community of La Balsita and neighbouring communities. Some 500 fled to the municipal capital, Dabeiba, Antioquia Department. Conscious of the continued dangers they faced as a peasant farmer community in the middle of a conflict zone, around 100 people decided to proclaim themselves members of the *Comunidad de Vida y Trabajo* Community of Life and Work, on 5 December 1999. The proclamation demands that the parties to the conflict respect the community's right not to be drawn into the conflict and seeks to secure guarantees for its safety.

Following an attack by the armed opposition group, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, (FARC), Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia, between 18 and 20 October 2000 against Dabeiba and surrounding areas, concerns increased for the safety of the former residents of La Balsita now living as the *Comunidad Vida y Trabajo*. (See Colombia: Return to Hope, AMR 23/23/00, June 2000 for more details). Reportedly in the aftermath of this attack the La Balsita displaced were accused by paramilitaries of facilitating the FARC incursion. In the past forcibly displaced people have been labelled guerrilla sympathizers and collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies, accusations which have frequently been followed by death threats and serious human rights violations. At the same time the displaced community has denounced that guerrilla forces have also accused them of supporting

paramilitary forces, raising concerns of possible guerrilla attacks against members of the community.

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the people of the Comunidad de Vida y Trabajo and the civilian population of Dabeiba, Antioquia Department;
- urging the authorities to take action to protect the community, in line with the community's own wishes;
- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Antioquia, despite repeated government commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Antioquia, with the results made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

National Advocate for the People

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz

Defensor del Pueblo

Defensoría del Pueblo

Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 office 301

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Defensor del Pueblo, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 640 0491 / 314 7300

Salutation: Dear Mr. Cifuentes Muñoz / Estimado Sr. Cifuentes Muñoz

Commander of the IV Brigade of the Army

General Eduardo Herrera Verbel

Comandante de la IV Brigada

Calle 50 No. 76-126

Medellín, Antioquia, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Comandante de la IV Brigada, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Fax: +57 4 230 9800 (when the phone is answered ask for the fax tone, "el tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Dear General Herrera Verbel / Sr. General Herrera Verbel

Commander of the XVII Brigade of the Army

Coronel Gutierrez

Comandante de la XVII Brigada

Carepa, Urabá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Comandante de la XVII Brigada, Carepa, Urabá Colombia

Fax: +57 4 823 6601

Salutation: Dear Colonel Gutierrez / Sr. Colonel Gutierrez

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

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 566 20 71

Salutation: Dear President Pastrana / Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente Pastrana

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace
Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz
AA 31861
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 14 February 2002.