

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 23/09/98

UA 52/98 Fear for safety / Extrajudicial execution / Disappearance

17 February 1998

COLOMBIA Fear for safety: Inhabitants of Puerto Asís

Extrajudicial execution or 'disappearance' of more than 26 inhabitants of Puerto Asís, department of Putumayo including: Johnny Delgado (minor, student), Luz Marina (minor, student) Sandra Milena Hurtado (minor, student), Carlos Acosta (16 year-old), Luis Emiro Mosquera, Gilberto Sánchez, Serafín Merino Rosero and Genaro Saenz.

There is grave concern for the physical safety of the inhabitants of Puerto Asís and the surrounding region in Putumayo department, after around 300 paramilitary gunmen arrived in the area at the end of January 1998 and began to selectively kill community members.

According to reports, the paramilitaries have a "blacklist" of 250 names of intended victims, who they accuse of being guerrilla auxiliaries. Those accused of being guerrilla sympathizers and collaborators by the Colombian security forces, or their paramilitary allies, often become victims of human rights violations.

Among the first to be killed were two secondary school students: Johnny Delgado and Sandra Milena Hurtado, the latter was killed for reportedly being the girlfriend of a guerrilla fighter. On 8 February 1998 paramilitary gunmen began openly patrolling the streets of Puerto Asís. On the same day one such patrol killed Carlos Acosta in broad daylight, then immediately shot and killed a witness who was attempting to flee. Since then there are reports that paramilitaries have killed more than 40 residents of the town, and a further 10 in nearby Valle del Guamuez. Many of the victims were reportedly tortured before being killed. The *Defensoria del Pueblo*, the National Advocate for the People has so far officially confirmed the killing of 26 people. The paramilitary violence has led many more residents to flee the area.

The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, an armed opposition group, has long had a strong presence in the southern jungle department of Putumayo. During a summit in 1996 paramilitary leaders stated their intention of attacking the FARC stronghold of Putumayo. Residents of the department reported the appearance of paramilitary gunmen in 1997, but security force officials then and now continue to deny there has been any increase in paramilitary violence. Since December 1997 the area has been heavily militarized by the Colombian army, after 18 soldiers were taken hostage by the FARC. The mayor of Puerto Asís, Néstor Hector, has alleged that the main paramilitary force arrived in the town in military helicopters. The Ministry of Defence has denied this claim.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members of the Colombian army and security forces, together with 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. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups, in many areas of the country they continue to work with the support of the security forces. President Ernesto Samper Pizano has made repeated promises, including as recently as December 1997, to improve

the human rights situation and to dismantle paramilitary forces. However, no steps have been taken to control their actions and to hold members accountable for serious and widespread human rights violations. The *Fiscal General*, Attorney General recently made public that there are over 200 outstanding arrest warrants against alleged paramilitary members which the security forces have not acted on.

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 Puerto Asís and Valle del Guamuez in the department of Putumayo;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the killing of more than 26 inhabitants of the region by paramilitary gunmen, for the results to be made public and for those responsible be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the area and urging that those members of the security forces 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 governmental commitments.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano
 Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño
 Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Samper, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 2186/289 3377/286 7434

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper

Minister of Defence

Dr. Gilberto Echeverri Mejía
 Ministro de Defensa Nacional, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
 Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez
 Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación
 Diagonal 22B 5201, Apartado Aéreo 29855
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2000 (ext 2017)- when ansaphone picks up dial 2017 for fax

Salutation: Estimado Dr./Dear Dr.

COPIES TO:

Governmental: Advocate for the People:

Dr. José Fernando Castro Caycedo
 Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo, Calle 55 No.10-32
 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 31 March 1998.