

UA 73/98 Fear for Safety/Possible "Disappearances"/PossibleExtrajudicial**COLOMBIA Killed:**

Casimiro SOTO ARDILA  
Omar BELLO MARTÍNEZ

**Fear for safety/Disappeared:**

a young woman and four men, inhabitants of Pueblito Mejía,  
Municipality of Barranco de Loba, Department of Bolívar

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There is serious concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the hamlet of Pueblito Mejía following an incursion by heavily armed men on 2 March 1998 during which two inhabitants were killed and other members of the community threatened. There is also concern for a young woman and four men abducted by the armed group whose whereabouts remain unknown.

According to information received, a group of approximately 300 heavily-armed men, identifying themselves as members of a paramilitary group, entered the community of Pueblito Mejía at 2:00am. Casimiro Soto Ardila and Omar Bello Martínez were seized and killed. At 7:00am the gunmen decapitated Casimiro Soto Ardila witnessed by the community which had been forced to assemble. Omar Bello was later shot to death. An eight-year-old boy was reportedly wounded in the shooting. Carlos Mejía and Ismael Canabate were also seized but later released.

The military incursion has reportedly resulted in approximately 100 families fleeing their homes and seeking shelter in the municipal capital Barranco de Loba.

This attack heightens concerns for the safety of the inhabitants of the municipality of Barranco de Loba and the neighbouring municipalities of Tiquisio, Morales and Río Viejo. Concerns are further heightened by the fact that the armed group reportedly stated to witnesses that their next targets were the communities of Buena Señá and Buena Vista in the municipalities of Río Viejo and Morales respectively. On 3 March the armed group was reported to be heading towards the community of Sudan in the municipality of Tiquisio.

Over the last year there have been a number of attacks in these municipalities and other municipalities of the south of Bolívar in which inhabitants considered to be guerrilla collaborators or sympathizers have been the victim of serious human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups operating in unison with the Colombian armed forces.

According to witnesses, the armed group was made up of a large number of armed men wearing Colombian army uniforms with the insignia of the *Batallón Nariño*, Nariño Battalion attached to the *Segunda Brigada*, Second Brigade.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Members of the Colombian army and security forces, together with their paramilitary allies, continue to commit serious abuses 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 Colombian 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 has made repeated promises 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.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the municipality of Barranco de Loba following an armed incursion into the community of Pueblito Mejia on 2 March 1998 and in particular for the five people abducted and whose whereabouts remain unknown and also for inhabitants of the neighbouring municipalities of Tiquisio, Morales and Río Viejo;
- urging that all measures deemed appropriate by the inhabitants of these municipalities are undertaken to guarantee their safety;
- urging that full and impartial investigations into the apparent extrajudicial executions of Casimiro Soto Ardila and Omar Bello Martínez, the wounding of an eight-year-old boy are undertaken and the whereabouts of the five people abducted, that the results are made public and that those responsible are brought to justice;
- urging that if any of these five people is in detention, they be charged with a recognizable criminal offence or be released immediately;
- urging that if any of these five people is in detention that they should be guaranteed immediate access to lawyers; relatives and medical doctors;
- calling for immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area, in line with stated government policy, in order to ensure the safety of the civilian population;
- 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.

**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 Pizano, 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)

**Salutation:** Estimado Dr. Méndez / Dear Dr. Méndez

Governor of Bolívar Department

Sra. Araceli Morales de Leignalet

Gobernadora de Bolívar

Calle 34, No 4-21, Cartagena, Bolívar

**Telegrams:** Gobernadora de Bolívar, Cartagena, Bolívar

**Salutation:** Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

**In appeals to the Governor, acknowledge that guerrilla forces in Colombia have violated international humanitarian law; underline that such abuses in no way justify human rights violations by the Colombian security forces and their paramilitary allies.**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights Organization

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 17 April 1998.