

UA 36/02

Fear for

COLOMBIA Manuel Francisco Navarro Culma (m), leader of the displaced community of Ciénaga del Opón

Community leader Manuel Francisco Navarro Culma was reportedly abducted in Barrancabermeja on 2 February, by gunmen believed to be army-backed paramilitaries. His whereabouts are unknown, and Amnesty International is seriously concerned for his safety.

According to witnesses, he was seen at 2pm in a place known as "La Rampa". Three men in civilian clothing reportedly took him to the Arenal neighbourhood. The following day, at 10am, he was reportedly seen near the football stadium, with men known to be members of the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, who operate in the area. He was seen again that day in different parts of the city, at 8pm and again at 9.30pm.

Manuel Francisco is a leader of the forcibly displaced community of Ciénaga del Opón. People from the community reported his abduction shortly after it took place. The police called off the search at 5pm, a few hours later.

Ciénaga del Opón is an area about 25km to the north of Barrancabermeja, department of Santander. Armed opposition groups are fighting for control of the area with the army and their paramilitary allies. In November 2000, the conflict forced approximately 126 families who live there to flee their homes. Since then they have been living in Barrancabermeja.

According to press reports, 20 of these displaced families began returning to Ciénaga del Opón on 3 February to rebuild the community's homes and their lives. This process is being assisted by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Forcibly displaced communities and their leaders are frequently labelled as guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. These accusations have often been followed by serious human rights violations committed by the latter. Displaced communities who have been forced to abandon military or economically strategic areas have frequently faced threats and human rights violations when they have sought to return to their abandoned lands.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Manuel Francisco Navarro Culma, who was reportedly abducted by army-backed paramilitaries in Barrancabermeja on 2 February, and urging the authorities to find out where he is;
- urging the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into his "disappearance", to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- expressing serious concern for the safety of people from Ciénaga del Opón, who have recently begun returning to their homes;
- urging the authorities to take all measures that the communities themselves deem appropriate to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Santander, despite repeated 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 Santander, urging

that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

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: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President

Attorney General

Dr. Luis Camilo Osorio,
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Apartado Aéreo 29855, Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite),
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Fiscal General, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2000

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

Governor of Santander Department

Sr. Jorge Eliecer Gómez Villamizar,
Gobernador del Departamento de Santander, Gobernación de Santander,
Calle 37, No. 10-30,
Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Telegram: Gobernador Santander, Bucaramanga, Colombia

Fax: +57 76 339889 / 633 9666

Salutation: Dear Governor / Sr. Gobernador

COPIES 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

Telegram: National Advocate, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 640 0491

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

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 19 March 2002.