

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/17/00

UA 80/00

Fear for Safety

7 April 2000

COLOMBIA The civilian population of El Tarra and Tibú, Norte de Santander

Killed: Ramón María Sánchez Sánchez, César Fernando Contreras, Victor Manuel Peña Remolina, Fabio Sánchez Barrera, José Martín Niño Rodríguez, José Laguado Contreras, Ovidio Gómez García, Pablo Antonio Yepes Santiago, Jesús Martín Urbina Jaimes, Nelson Carrascal Ascanio, José Hilario Santana Sánchez, Luis Ramón Beleño, Eliodoro Suárez, Luis Omar López Parada, Fredy Sepúlveda Durán, Evangelista Flórez Durán, Héctor Julio Casadiego and four others.

On 6 April 2000, paramilitaries reportedly shot dead 21 members of a displaced community sheltering in the town of Tibú, department of Norte de Santander. In the light of the continued failure of the authorities to combat paramilitarism and protect civilians in the region, Amnesty International is now seriously concerned for the safety of other displaced communities in the area.

The paramilitaries, who belong to the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, reportedly went into Tibú, dragged people from their homes and shot them in front of their families. Those shot appeared to be on a "death list", "*lista negra*" used by paramilitaries to identify their victims. Such lists often contain the names of people the security forces and their paramilitary allies label as guerrilla sympathizers or collaborators. Those whose names appear on such lists are often in grave danger.

Amnesty International is alarmed that the AUC were free to go into and leave Tibú despite many warnings to the security forces of the increasing presence of paramilitary forces in the area (see UA 16/00 AMR 23/02/00, 24 January 2000 and AMR 23/10/00, 8 March 2000). The government and armed forces failed to protect the community despite these warnings and despite the fact that the Colombian army's "*Batallón Héroes de Saraguro*", "Heroes of Saraguro Battalion", attached to the V Brigade, were based less than one kilometre away.

Although Amnesty International welcomes reports that on 29 March the *V Brigada* arrested three AUC paramilitaries near Tibú, it believes that government efforts are still clearly inadequate. The government continues to ignore commitments it has made and repeated UN recommendations to take action to combat paramilitarism and protect civilians.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Communities from La Gabarra and Filo Gringo fled to El Tarra and neighbouring towns recently after the community of Filo Gringo was threatened with attack. On 3 March paramilitaries were able to burn the village of Filo Gringo to the ground despite warnings issued by state authorities and human rights organizations to the army of a possible imminent attack.

This massacre is the latest in a series of attacks by paramilitaries in the region as part of an offensive launched by them on 29 May 1999 involving a heavily armed, 400-strong force. Since then gunmen have set up checkpoints on the road from La Gabarra, in Norte de Santander department, to the municipal capital, Tibú, in order to stop local people traveling along it. They have also reportedly killed five local peasant farmers. Since December 1999 they have renewed threats to kill people they accuse of being guerrilla collaborators from communities in El Tarra.

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 living in the municipalities of El Tarra and Tibú, Norte de Santander department, and urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee their safety;

- condemning the massacre of 21 people on 6 April 2000 in the municipality of El Tarra and calling for a full and impartial investigation, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern at the failure of the government and armed forces to take steps to protect the civilian populations of El Tarra and Tibú, despite repeated warnings of an impending paramilitary attack in the area;
- asking what measures the government and armed forces are going to take to protect the civilian population of El Tarra.

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

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434 / 284 2186 / 337 1351

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Néstor Humberto Martínez

Ministro del Interior

Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministerio Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025 / 281 5584 / 342 3201 / 341 9739

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Commander of the 5th Brigade

General Martín Orlando Carreño Sandoval

Comandante de la V Brigada

Calle 14, Carrera 33, Bucaramanga

Santander, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Comandante, Quinta Brigada, Santander, Colombia.

Faxes: + 57 76 455051 / 76 351493

Salutation: Sr. Comandante / Dear Commander

COPIES TO:

Alternative Legal Association

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 19 May 2000.