

UA 41/99 Fear for safety / "disappearance" /
extrajudicial execution

3 March 1999

COLOMBIA Edgar Alfonso Sierra Sindrai (minor)] "Disappeared"
Miguel Angel Cifuentes]
Orlando Forero Tarazona] Killed
José Darío Sánchez]
Israel Ariza]
Leonardo Guzmán]
José Darío Hernández]
William Rojas]
Oscar Manuel Barroso]
Jesús Manuel Gil]
Parmenio Terraza Zuleta]
Pedro Palacios (injured)

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the civilian population of the town of Barrancabermeja, Santander Department. A group of heavily armed gunmen believed to be members of a paramilitary force entered the city on the afternoon of 28 February 1999 and reportedly killed at least eight people, and abducted three others, one of whom has since been found dead.

The 20-strong heavily armed paramilitary force entered the northeastern area of the city at about 5 pm in three vehicles. Eyewitnesses have reported that they had a deserter from a guerrilla group with them. In the past guerrilla defectors have helped paramilitary organizations to target civilians considered to be guerrilla sympathizers.

The paramilitary force passed through the district of Provivienda, killing José Darío Sánchez and Orlando Forero Tarazona and injuring Pedro Palacios, and the Versalles district, where they shot dead Israel Ariza. In the Ramaral district they forcibly abducted Edgar Alfonso Sierra Sindrai, a schoolboy member of the youth wing of the *Organización Feminina Popular* (OFP), Popular Women's Organization, a regional non-governmental human rights organization.

On the main road out of the city toward the nearby town of Puerto Wilches the paramilitary group killed Leonardo Guzmán and José Darío Hernández, a taxi driver, near the San Silvestre district. They then set up a road-block further down the road where they stopped about 30 vehicles and shot dead William Rojas and Oscar Manuel Barroso. Nearby they killed Jesús Manuel Gil.

To leave the city the paramilitaries reportedly had to pass through a military check-point operated by the 45th Battalion, "Heroes of Majagual". The soldiers allowed the paramilitary group vehicles to pass through unhindered and later told police that the group had said they were judicial officials from the Office of the Attorney General. Armed forces officials have since denied that a military check point was operating on the road when the paramilitary force made their escape.

On 1 March at about 3am Parmenio Terraza Zuleta and Miguel Angel Cifuentes were forcibly abducted reportedly by Colombian Police officers, opposite the offices of the *Corporación Regional de Derechos Humanos* (CREDHOS), Regional Human Rights Corporation,. Parmenio Terraza Zuleta's body was found in the city district of La Paz on 2 March. The whereabouts of Miguel Angel Cifuentes remain unknown.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned that a paramilitary group could enter Barrancabermeja in daylight and carry out "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions, in spite of the extremely heavy army presence in the city.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Barrancabermeja is situated in central Colombia. Guerrilla groups have a strong presence in the southeastern and northeastern areas of the city. For several years, paramilitary groups operating in alliance with the armed forces have been responsible for many serious human rights violations. On 16 May 1998 paramilitary forces went into some poorer districts of Barrancabermeja, killed 11 people and forcibly abducted 25 others, whose whereabouts remain unknown. At least one soldier is under disciplinary investigation for his involvement in the incursion and several other security force officials are being investigated for dereliction of duty.

For details of further paramilitary incursions involving serious human right violations, see UA 156/98, (AMR 23/34/98, 18 May 1998) and follow ups.

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

- expressing deep concern for the safety of residents of Barrancabermeja and particularly Edgar Alfonso Sierra Sindrai and Miguel Angel Cifuentes who have not been seen since they were forcibly abducted on 28 February and 1 March;
- calling for all appropriate measures be taken to ensure the safety of the civilian population of Barrancabermeja;
- urging that full and impartial investigations be undertaken into the killings of those listed above and into the whereabouts of those forcibly abducted, that the results be made public and that 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 found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andres Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Tx: 44281 PALP CO

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

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/ Dear President Pastrana

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Nestor Humberto Martínez, Ministro del Interior
Ministerio del Interior, Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2
Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

Fax: + 57 1 286 0053

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Minister of Defence

Dr. Rodrigo Lloreda, Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Governor of Santander Department

Sr. Miguel de Jesús Arenas Prada, Gobernador del Departamento de Santander
Gobernación de Santander, Calle 37, No. 10-30, Bucaramanga, Colombia

Faxes: 5776 339889

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador/ Dear Governor

COPIES TO: Human rights organization: CREDHOS, AA 505, Barrancabermeja
Santander, 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 April 1999.