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£COLOMBIA

@POLICE ABUSES IN CARCASÍ

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Two men were killed by unidentified attackers in October 1992 near the town of Carcasí in the province of García Rovira¹, department of Santander. Their killings were denounced by the local priest who then received death threats and was the victim of an attack on his life, both reportedly by the police. Amnesty International is seeking information about investigations into the October killings and into the threats and attack against Father Duarte.

During the evening of 11 October, **Pastor Ballesteros Tarazona**, a farm worker, was siezed by a group of armed men in civilian dress as he was putting his horse out to graze. **José Terry Pérez Castellanos**, a 22 year old agriculture student, witnessed the incident and was also siezed. The next day, as Carcasí began celebrating a cultural day of reflexion to mark the 500th anniversary of the Europeans' "discovery" of Latin America, the bodies of the two men were found, thrown in a heap under a vine tree on a roadside. They had been shot in the head. An autopsy performed on 12 October by the rural doctor of Carcasí confirms that death was the result of injuries caused by firearm. Amnesty International has no information about any investigations into the killings.

Father **Rafael Duarte Ortíz**, parish priest of Carcasí, made a formal request to the Police Commander and his agents to provide all the necessary information regarding the killing of Pastor Ballesteros and Terry Pérez. This formal request was made in the presence of the Mayor (*alcalde*) and Ombudsperson (*personero*). Witnesses claim to have heard the Police Commander say: "That old son of a whore is going to have to pay" ("*Ese viejo hijo de puta tiene que pagarlas*") and other police agents say: "We've got to get rid of this priest, and we won't go until we've done it" ("*a ese cura lo tenemos que bajar y no nos iremos sin haberlo hecho*"). Threats were also made against the people of Carcasí, who have supported the victims' families and their parish priest. In a Carcasí restaurant Police agents have been heard to say: "We're not leaving this village without bombing it" ("*De este pueblo no nos vamos sin hacerlo bombardear*").

¹ Colombia is geopolitically divided into departments and municipalities. "Provincia" is an archaic term still used in some areas, dating back to the colonial period as used by the Spanish, eg. "provincia de Ocaña". The "provincia" de García Rovira" covers parts of Santander and North Santander departments.

Father Rafael Duarte was fired at by two members of the Colombian National police during the afternoon of 8 January 1993. Father Rafael Duarte had just celebrated mass in Carcasí and was talking with the churchgoers when several members of the police surrounded him and began following him as he walked through the town. As he turned a corner two police agents fired shots at Father Rafael. Neither Father Rafael nor those around him, including minors, was injured. Father Rafael Duarte sought refuge in a nearby house for a while and later had to be accompanied home by Carcasí community members. During this time the police reportedly remained in Carcasí, running through the streets shouting and threatening.

The threats and attack against Father Rafael Duarte were denounced to the Regional Procurator, the Procurator General, the Public Prosecutor, the People's Advocate and the Governor of Santander department. (*Procurador Regional, Procurador General, Fiscal General, Defensor del Pueblo, Gobernador del departamento de Santander*). Father Duarte left Carcasí for a while following the attempt on his life and has now returned. According to reports police personnel allegedly responsible for the attack on his life have been transferred from Carcasí. However, Amnesty International has no information regarding the investigation into the attack or any disciplinary action that may have been taken against the police agents responsible.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Carcasí is situated in the largely rural area of Magdalena Medio in central Colombia. It has been the focus of political violence for several years following the emergence of guerrilla groups in the 1960s and subsequent militarization of the region during the 1980s. Human rights abuses have escalated in the region, including enforced recruitment, torture, extrajudicial execution and "disappearance" committed by the Colombian army, police and paramilitary forces working with them, against members of the civilian populations who are perceived as potential guerrilla collaborators. People working in defence of human rights, including parish priests, have increasingly become targets. Human rights violations in Colombia are committed in such a way that the perpetrators do so with virtual impunity. For example, witnesses are frequently harassed and killed to prevent them testifying. Relatives and friends of victims, or others helping them are threatened and killed if they persist with their denunciations.

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