

UA 144/98 Fear for safety / Extrajudicial execution

6 May 1998

COLOMBIAThe inhabitants of Puerto Alvira village, including

Hernán Fabián Cuéllar Díaz	} extrajudicially executed
Jorgee Suárez	}
Alejandro Sánez	}
Carlos Bernal	}
Pedro Julio Rico	}
Wilson Bernal	}
Jorge Peladura	}
Angie Carolina, aged 5	}
10 unnamed individuals	}
eight unnamed individuals	} "disappeared"
and four others injured	

On 4 May 1998 a 200-strong paramilitary force killed at least 18 residents of Puerto Alvira village, municipality of Mapiripán, Meta Department. According to the International Red Cross a further eight "disappeared" and four others were badly injured.

The 1500 families living in the village were told to leave within eight days or face the same fate. Many have subsequently fled to the municipal capital, Mapiripán.

The heavily armed paramilitaries reportedly wore uniforms bearing the insignia of one of Colombia's largest paramilitary groups, the *Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá* (ACCU), Peasant Self-Defence Forces of Córdoba and Urabá. They apparently had a list of residents' names and went straight to their homes. After not finding any of those on the list, the paramilitaries forced all the village residents into the street and shot 18 people, including five-year-old Angie Carolina. The village infrastructure, housing and businesses were then systematically destroyed. A military aeroplane reportedly provided the paramilitaries with support.

Although the Colombian Government was warned that an attack would take place, it did nothing to prevent it. In January the *Defensor del Pueblo*, National Ombudsman, formally requested protection for the inhabitants of Puerto Alvira. One hundred village residents had originally written a letter stating that their community was being threatened by both paramilitary and guerrilla forces operating in the region.

Up to 30 residents were murdered in a similar paramilitary attack in Mapiripán in July 1997 (see UA 228/97, AMR 23/50/98, 22 July 1997), for which the ACCU were reportedly responsible. Some armed forces personnel have since been detained on charges of aiding the paramilitaries in carrying out the attack in July 1997.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peasant communities in disputed zones in Colombia's long running civil conflict have frequently suffered attacks. Neither the left wing armed opposition groups or the armed forces and their paramilitary allies recognize the civilian population's neutrality in the conflict.

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Over the past five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. The Colombian government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989, yet they continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

President Ernesto Samper Pizano has repeatedly promised to improve the human rights situation and to dismantle paramilitary forces, but no steps have been taken to control

their actions and to hold members accountable for serious and widespread human rights violations. The Attorney General recently stated that over 200 outstanding arrest warrants issued against alleged paramilitary members have still not been acted upon by the security forces.

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 of Puerto Alvira, municipality of Mapiripán, Meta Department;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the killing of at least 18 village residents by paramilitary gunmen, as well as the "disappearance" of a further eight, for the results to be made public and for those responsible be brought to justice;
- requesting that if those who have "disappeared" are in detention, their families be informed, and that they be provided with proper medical attention and legal representation;
- 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 found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging that authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated governmental commitments.

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

Tx: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 286 7434

Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Samper

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Alfonso López Caballero

Ministro del Interior

Ministerio del Interior

Carrera 8, No.8-09, Piso 2

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes:45406 MINGO CO

Salutation:Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Fax:+ 57 1 281 5884 / 286 6524 / 286 0405

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 de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO / 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Advocate for the People (Ombudsman):

Dr.José Fernando Castro Caycedo, Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo

Calle 55 No.10-32,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 June 1998.