

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/30/99

UA 70/99 Fear for safety / "Disappearance"

8 April 1999

COLOMBIA **12 people, including community leaders, forcibly abducted from the Peace Communities of Villahermosa and Clavellino, Chocó department**

There is serious concern for the safety of 12 people, including community leaders, abducted from the "Peace Communities" (*Comunidades de Paz*) of Villahermosa and Clavellino by paramilitaries on 7 April 1999. Their whereabouts are now unknown, but national paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño has reportedly acknowledged that his forces are holding them.

A heavily armed paramilitary force from the *Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá* (ACCU), Peasant Self-Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá, entered Villahermosa and Clavellino, in the northwestern region of Urabá and opened fire: according to unconfirmed reports, several people were injured or killed. They forcibly abducted 12 people and headed in the direction of another "Peace Community" in Domingodó.

Today Carlos Castaño reportedly told the press that his forces are going to target other "Peace Communities" and human rights activists working with them. (See UA 64/99, AMR 23/29/9, 6 April 1999 on the attack on the community of San José de Apartadó).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People forcibly displaced from their lands in Urabá by massacres committed by army-backed paramilitary groups and guerrilla organizations in 1996 and 1997 set up "Peace Communities" to try to persuade the warring factions to respect their neutrality in the conflict and their right to life. Since then, many community members have "disappeared", been extrajudicially executed, or threatened with death, mainly by army-backed paramilitary groups, but also by members of the Colombian army and the *Fuerzas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

In recent months members of the displaced communities of Urabá who have been living in camps in the town of Turbo and village of Pavarandó, have been trying to return to their lands. "Peace Communities" such as Villahermosa, Clavellino and Domingodó, in the municipality of Riosucio, Chocó department, have been set up as part of this process.

The displaced communities have repeatedly demanded that the government secure conditions for their safe return, and guarantee their safety in the Peace Communities, yet the authorities have done nothing to end the campaign of attacks on them. The government has also failed to act when senior regional armed forces commanders and political leaders have publicly accused communities of being guerrilla sympathizers because they refuse to allow any armed group, including the Colombian army, to maintain a presence there.

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious human rights violations with impunity. Over the past five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced from their homes. Although in 1989 the government removed the legal basis for the Colombian armed forces to set up these paramilitary groups, they have grown and consolidated into nationwide organizations. They continue to operate, in many cases, with the support or acquiescence of the Colombian armed forces. The Colombian government have taken no effective steps to control them or hold them accountable for their criminal actions.

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

- expressing grave concern for the safety of 12 members of the "Peace communities" of Villahermosa and Clavellino who were reportedly abducted by a paramilitary force on 7 April 1999 and calling on the authorities to secure their safe release;
- calling for a prompt, impartial and full investigation into the paramilitary incursion and abductions of 7 April, for the results to be made public and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of all residents of Villahermosa, Clavellino and other "Peace Communities" in Urabá, particularly Domingodó;
- expressing concern for the safety of human rights workers accompanying the displaced communities in their efforts to return to their lands;
- urging the government to take immediate and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with their own repeated commitments.

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: + 571 284 2186/289 3377/ 286 7434

E-mail pastrana@presidencia.gov.co

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/ Dear President Pastrana

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

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación
AA 29855, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2022

Salutation: Estimado Dr. / Dear Dr.

Governor of the Department of Antioquia

Dr Alberto Builes Ortega, Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia
Gobernación de Antioquia, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia

Fax: + 574 381 1342

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

Regional Military Commander:

General Martín Orlando Carreño Sandoval,
Comandante XVII Brigada del Ejército, Carepá, Urabá, Antioquia, Colombia

Tel/Fax: 57 4 823 6844/ 823 6601

Salutation: Sr. Comandante/ Dear Commander Carreño

COPIES TO:Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz, AA 31861, Santafé de Bogotá

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 20 May 1999.