

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 23/32/92

Distr: UA/SC

UA 191/92

Fear of Extrajudicial Execution

8 June 1992

COLOMBIA: William OCAMPO CASTAÑO, mayor
María Mercedes MENDEZ (female), former mayoress
Rosa PEÑA RODRIGUEZ (female), municipal treasurer
Ernesto ZARRALDA, regional political leader
Pedro AGUDELO, driver

Amnesty International has learned with concern of the killing of William Ocampo, María Mercedes Méndez, Rosa Peña Rodríguez, Ernesto Zarralda and Pedro Agudelo, all members of the legal left-wing coalition party Patriotic Union, Unión Patriótica, (UP) on 3 June 1992 in circumstances suggesting they may have been victims of extrajudicial execution.

According to reports, the victims had travelled from El Castillo, Meta department to the departmental capital, Villavicencio, on the morning of 3 June to lodge an official complaint, *denuncia*, with regional authorities about human rights violations against the civilian population by the Colombian armed forces. The UP authorities had also reportedly denounced repeated death threats they received. The party left Villavicencio at approximately 3 pm and was returning to the town of El Castillo when, at approximately 5.30 pm, their vehicle was attacked at a point known as Caño Cebado, 1 km from the town of Granada, by a group of heavily armed men, some of whom were reportedly wearing army uniforms. Hand grenades were reportedly thrown at the vehicle and then the victims were shot at close range. One man survived, with head injuries. There is a heavy military presence throughout the region where the killings took place but despite the close proximity of two army bases, in El Castillo and Granada, the gunmen escaped.

William Ocampo was the recently-elected UP mayor of El Castillo and had been in office for only three days. María Mercedes Méndez was the town's outgoing mayoress. Rosa Peña Rodríguez was the municipal treasurer, Ernesto Zarralda an official from the town's Municipal Technical Assistance Unit, Unidad Municipal de Asistencia Técnica and Pedro Agudelo, the driver of the vehicle.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Coinciding with a escalating offensive by the Colombian armed forces against the armed opposition group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, in the department of Meta, Amnesty International has received an increasing number reports of human rights violations against non-combatant civilians by army personnel in the areas undergoing counter-insurgency operations. Abuses against the civilian population have included arbitrary arrest, torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution. Victims are principally peasant farmers in areas which have for many years been dominated by the FARC and also the leaders and members of the legal left-wing coalition party Unión Patriótica (UP). The UP was created in 1985 as a result of a peace process between the FARC (and other guerrilla groups) and the government. Many former FARC

guerrillas who were amnestied during the peace process and returned to civilian life became members of the UP. Since that peace process was aborted in 1985 the leaders and members of the UP have been subject to a systematic campaign of intimidation and physical elimination: the UP claims that over 1,500 of its members have been victims of politically motivated killings. The majority of these killings have been attributed by Colombian authorities to paramilitary groups which it claims it is unable to control. However independent investigations, including judicial inquiries have concluded that many such groups operate under the command or with the support of the Colombian security forces.

Page 2 of UA 191/92

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing serious concern at the killing of UP members William Ocampo, María Mercedes Méndez, Rosa Peña Rodríguez, Ernesto Zarralda and Pedro Agudelo in circumstances suggesting they were victims of extrajudicial execution;
- urging that there be an immediate and thorough inquiry into the killings, the results of which should be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities take all possible measures to protect members of opposition parties, so that they can carry out their lawful activities in safety.

APPEALS TO

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

**Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/
Dear President Gaviria**

Telegrams: President Gaviria, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 286 3066, + 57 1 286 7324, + 57 1 287 7937

2) Minister of Defence:

Dr. Rafael Pardo Rueda
Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

**Sr. Ministro/
Dear Minister**

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa Pardo Rueda, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 222 1874

3) Commander of the Armed Forces:

General Manuel Murillo González
Comandante del Ejército
Avenida Eldorado - Carrera 52
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

**Sr. Comandante/
Dear Commander**

Telegrams: Comandante del Ejercito, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 43401 COEJC

4) Minister of Justice:

Fernando Carillo
Ministro de Justicia
Ministerio de Justicia
Carrera 15, No 9-63
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

**Sr. Ministro/
Dear Minister**

Telegrams: Ministro Justicia, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 284 0472

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

1) Procurator General:

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta Padilla
Procurador General de la Nación
Procuraduría General, Edificio Banco Ganadero
Carrera 5, No. 15-80
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

2) Human Rights and Educational Organization:

Señores, CINEP
AA 25916
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 July 1992.