

UA 148/96 Apparent extrajudicial executions / Fear for safety 17 June 1996

COLOMBIA **Guillermo León BARRERA HENAO**  
**Francisco Javier TABORDA TABORDA**  
**Alvaro VÁSQUEZ**

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the inhabitants of the municipality of El Carmen del Atrato, department of Chocó, following the killing, in circumstances suggesting extrajudicial execution, of the three men named above on 13 June 1996.

According to information received a group of seven armed men entered the community of El Siete, municipality of El Carmen del Atrato, at approximately 11am. The paramilitary group forced the inhabitants to assemble in the La Virgen district of the community, where they also mounted a roadblock and forced all those travelling by road to assemble. The paramilitary group was reportedly in possession of a "*lista negra*", "black list", from which they called out the names of Guillermo León Barrera Henao and Francisco Javier Taborda Taborda. The paramilitary group forced the two men to sit down, opened fire on one of the them, told the inhabitants to run, and then shot the other man. As the killings were taking place, one member of the paramilitary group painted slogans on doors and walls: "*no más guerrilla, muerte a sapos. Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá*" ("no more guerrilla, death to guerrilla collaborators. Peasant Farmer Self-defense of Córdoba and Urabá").

Shortly after the killings, the paramilitary group killed another man, Alvaro Vásquez, who reportedly refused to transport the paramilitary group. The armed men set fire to his vehicle before killing him. All three of the dead men worked as drivers of public hire vehicles.

The day before, 12 June, members of the Colombian Army, reportedly belonging to the *Batallón Granaderos*, Granaderos Battalion, had detained Guillermo León Barrera and a group of students and ex-students from the Marco Fidel Suárez school. Guillermo León Barrera was taken to a stable where he was accused of being a guerrilla collaborator, of transporting guerrillas in his vehicle which, the soldiers alleged, belonged to the guerrilla. The names of the students were noted by the military and later released. They were reportedly subsequently subjected to surveillance by the security forces.

The killings in the El Carmen del Atrato occurred 10 days after armed forces in the region were reinforced with troops from the Granaderos Battalion and the *Batallón Cacique Nutibara*, Cacique Nutibara Battalion. Despite the fact that the killings took place approximately 10 minutes drive from a Colombian army post, members of the armed forces only arrived on the scene of the killings one hour later, long after the paramilitary had left.

Before leaving the municipality the paramilitary group threatened to return, and left flyers signed by a group calling itself *Grupo Dignidad Antioqueña*, Group for the Dignity of Antioquia, in which shopkeepers and public transport workers who take part in guerrilla strikes are warned that "*pasaremos cuenta de cobro por su cobardía*" "you will pay for your cowardice".

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite repeated government pledges to protect human rights, members of the Colombian and security forces together with their paramilitary allies continue

to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. Many paramilitary groups have their origins in the civilian "self-defence" squads which the army created in the 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups throughout the country. Although in 1989 the Colombian government suspended the legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the Colombian armed forces to combat and disband such groups, paramilitary forces have continued to kill and "disappear" perceived opponents with impunity in many areas of the country and continue to work with the support of the security forces. President Ernesto Samper Pizano, who assumed office on 7 August 1994, has made repeated promises, both during his election campaign and since taking office, to improve the human rights situation. His promises include a commitment to dismantle paramilitary forces. However, no steps have been taken to control their actions and to hold members accountable for serious and widespread human rights violations.

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the municipality of El Carmen del Atrato, department of Chocó, following the apparent extrajudicial execution of Guillermo León Barrera Henao, Francisco Javier Taborda Taborda and Alvaro Vásquez on 13 June 1996 by members of a paramilitary group;
- calling for full, prompt and impartial investigations into the killings, for the results to be made public, and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the civilian population in the municipality of El Carmen del Atrato;

**if possible also:**

- urge that there be full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary forces and that those members of the security forces responsible for supporting such groups be brought to justice;
- urge the government to immediately fulfil its commitment to disband paramilitary forces currently operating as auxiliaries of the armed forces or with armed forces' complicity. Members of such forces responsible for human rights violations should be brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano  
 Presidente de la República  
 Palacio de Nariño, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: President Samper, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telexes: 44281 PALP CO**

**Faxes: + 57 1 286 7434/284 7186/284 7176**

**Salutation:Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Samper**

2) Minister of Defence

Dr. Juan Carlos Esguerra Portocarrero  
 Ministro de Defensa Nacional  
 Ministerio de Defensa Nacional  
 Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52  
 Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams:Ministro de Defensa , Bogota, Colombia**

**Telexes:42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 222 1874**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister**

3) Minister of the Interior

Dr. Horacio Serpa Uribe

Ministro del Interior

Ministerio del Interior

Carrera 8a, No.8-09, Piso 7

Santafé de Bogotá, COLOMBIA

**Telegrams: Ministro del Interior Serpa, Bogota, Colombia**

**Telexes:45406 MINGO CO**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 286 0485/284 0214**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Alternative Legal Association

SEMBRAR, AA 34692, 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 10 August 1996.