

During the attack, three young men, Luis Jesús Arguello, Germán León Quintero and José Javier Jaramillo Díaz, who tried to resist abduction were killed immediately. Some reports suggest that more than 43 people were abducted. By 19 May, 15 of those originally abducted reappeared alive.

Later that night, the paramilitary group entered the northeastern sector of the town. A truck, in which between 10 and 12 heavily armed men were travelling, reportedly parked outside the house of Osiris Bayter Ferias, president of the *Corporación Regional de Derechos Humanos*, (CREDHOS), Regional Human Rights Corporation, a regional non-governmental human rights organization. While the truck was parked outside her house, her telephone rang on several occasions, but there was no reply when she answered. There is serious concern for the safety of Osiris Bayter and other members of the CREDHOS since members of this organization have frequently received death threats by paramilitary groups and have been accused of being "guerrilla collaborators" by members of the Colombian Army and security forces. In the past, those labelled as guerrilla sympathizers or collaborators have frequently been the victims of serious human rights violations committed by the security forces or their paramilitary allies.

The paramilitary group remained in the El Campín district for approximately half an hour, firing shots sporadically. Despite the fact that this district is close to a military base, no apparent effort was made by the armed forces to prevent the attack.

At least 12 people are known to have been killed by the paramilitary group, including a six-year-old and 13-year-old boy. The discovery of several corpses has raised concern for the safety of those who remain abducted.

Jairo Massiol Cedeño, who had been abducted in the Nueve de Abril district, was reportedly released by the paramilitary group on Sunday, 17 May at 8pm. He had been tortured. The paramilitary warned that they would carry out a further attack in Barrancabermeja. Luis Eduardo Cañas, who had also been abducted, was also subsequently released after being beaten.

Amnesty International is also concerned for the safety of inhabitants of the nearby municipalities of Yondó, department of Antioquia, Cantagallo, department of Santander and San Pablo, department of Bolívar, since these communities have been reportedly threatened with a large-scale paramilitary incursion. Recently the *Defensor del Pueblo*, Human Rights Ombudsman stated that the municipality of Simití, north of San Pablo was under threat of paramilitary attack.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Barrancabermeja is situated in central Colombia. In the southeastern and northeastern sectors of the city guerrilla groups have a strong presence in the form of urban militia units. For several years, paramilitary groups operating in alliance with the armed forces have been responsible for many serious human rights violations. Among the communities which have witnessed human rights violations committed by paramilitary groups are the municipalities of Yondó (department of Antioquia); San Pablo (department of Bolívar) and Cantagallo (department of Santander) which have reportedly been threatened with a paramilitary attack.

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

- expressing deep concern for the safety of residents of Barrancabermeja and particularly the people forcibly abducted by a paramilitary group on 16 May 1998;
- urging that full and impartial investigations be undertaken into the possible extrajudicial executions listed above and into the whereabouts of those forcibly abducted whose whereabouts remain unknown, that the results be made public and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- expressing deep concern for the safety of inhabitants of the municipalities of Yondó, Cantagallo, San Pablo and Simití and for members of CREDHOS;
- urging that all appropriate measures be taken to guarantee the safety of these communities and members of CREDHOS;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the area and urging that those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups be brought to justice;
- urging that the authorities take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government 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, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO

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

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

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:CREDHOS

AA 505, Barrancabermeja, Santander, 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 30 June 1998.