

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 23/041/2003

29 May 2003

UA 153/03

Fear for safety/possible "disappearance"

COLOMBIA

Enrique Valencia (m), peasant farmer

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Enrique Valencia, a peasant farmer from the Cimitarra River Valley in central Colombia. He has not been seen since 27 May and it is feared he may have "disappeared".

At 9.45am on 27 May, Enrique Valencia was travelling in a boat from the city of Barrancabermeja, Santander Department, towards the Cimitarra Valley. When he reached a place known as La Rompida, on the Magdalena river, in the municipality of Yondó, Antioquia Department, the boat was reportedly stopped by army-backed paramilitaries. He has not been seen since, and reports suggest that he may have been abducted.

Amnesty International has received a number of reports over several years about a paramilitary checkpoint operating in the La Rompida area. National and international organizations have reported the existence of the paramilitary checkpoint to the authorities a number of times in recent years. However, no decisive action appears to have been taken by the Colombian security forces, despite the fact that La Rompida is located a short distance from the military base operated by the *Batallón Fluvial No. 30*, River Battalion Number 30 on the opposite bank of the Magdalena River.

Fears for the safety of Enrique Valencia are heightened by the fact that peasant farmers living in the Valle del Cimitarra area have repeatedly been labelled as subversives by army-backed paramilitaries in the region. These accusations have frequently been followed by serious human rights violations. The possible "disappearance" of Enrique Valencia follows recent death threats and attacks against the *Asociación Campesina de Valle del Cimitarra (ACVC)*, Peasant Farmers' Association of the Cimitarra Valley, an organization which represents peasant farming communities in the region. In March 2003, arrest warrants were issued against several leaders of the ACVC accused of being subversives. The issue of the warrants coincided with an apparent attempt on the life of an ACVC leader, Miguel Cifuentes, and further paramilitary death threats against the organization.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Barrancabermeja and surrounding areas in Santander department are under siege by army-backed paramilitaries who control entire areas of the region despite the strong presence of the security forces. Trade unionists, human rights defenders, other social activists and the civilian population have frequently been harassed, tortured and killed, often by paramilitaries who together with the security and armed forces have often accused them of being guerrilla sympathizers. Guerrilla forces have also been responsible for killing civilians they accuse of collaborating with their enemies.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Enrique Valencia, who has not been seen since 27 May;
- urging the authorities to do everything necessary to find him;
- expressing concern for the safety of peasant farmers and members of the *Asociación Campesina de Valle del Cimitarra (ACVC)*, workers and human rights activists, trade unionists and popular activists in the department of Santander, who have been repeatedly accused of collaborating with guerrilla forces and have reportedly been threatened and attacked by paramilitaries;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary forces in Barrancabermeja and surrounding areas, for the results to be made public and for those members of the

security forces responsible for operating in unison with paramilitary forces or supporting them to be brought to justice;

- expressing concern at the continued large-scale presence of army-backed paramilitaries in Barrancabermeja, despite the heavy military presence in the city;

- urging the authorities to take immediate decisive action to confront and dismantle these groups, in line with repeated UN recommendations and governmental commitments.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño

Carrera 8 No.7-26

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Presidente de la República, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 342 0592

Salutation: Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe/Dear President Uribe

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Fernando Londoño Hoyos,

Ministro del Interior y de Justicia

Ministerio del Justicia

Avenida Jiménez No 8-89

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegram: Ministro Interior, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 599 84 04

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Governor of Santander Department

Sr. Jorge Eliecer Gómez Villamizar,

Gobernador del Departamento de Santander, Gobernación de Santander,

Calle 37, No. 10-30,

Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Telegram: Gobernador Santander, Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia

Fax: + 57 76 842 843

Salutation: Dear Governor Gómez Villamizar / Sr. Gobernador Gómez Villamizar

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental Human Rights Organization

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 10 July 2003.