

PUBLIC

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16 December 2005

Further Information on UA 272/05 (AMR 23/037/2005, 17 October 2005) and follow-up (AMR 23/038/2005, 27 October 2005) - Fear for safety

**COLOMBIA**    **Members of the Afro-descendant communities of the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó River Basins**

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The Afro-descendant communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins in Chocó Department are believed to be in grave danger, following reports that the communities have been threatened by soldiers and army-backed paramilitaries.

According to reports, on 10 December, troops belonging to the XVII Brigade of the Colombian Army reportedly threatened inhabitants of the community of Pueblo Nuevo, in the Jiguamiandó River Basin area. The troops reportedly told community members that they were going to enter the area with paramilitaries and burn down "all this shit which is not yours" (*toda esta mierda que no es de ustedes*).

Amnesty International has received reports of threats made against communities in the region by the army-backed paramilitary group, the *Bloque Elmer Cárdenas*, Elmer Cárdenas Bloc. This group is now reportedly operating under the name of "*Héroes del Atrato*", "Heroes of the Atrato", apparently in order to disguise the fact that it is continuing to carry out paramilitary activities, despite being involved in a government-sponsored process supposedly aimed at demobilizing paramilitary groups. Witnesses report that these paramilitaries are threatening to raid Afro-descendant communities in the Jiguamiandó and Curbaradó River Basins. Paramilitaries allegedly said of the communities: "The problem with these blacks is that they occupy the best lands; we're going to sort it out the way we know how..." (*el problema de esos negros, que están con las mejores tierras del país, lo vamos a arreglar como sabemos...*).

These communities have attempted to assert their right as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict between left-wing guerrillas and government security forces backed by paramilitaries, by insisting that armed groups remain outside the areas where they live which they have declared "humanitarian refuge zones", ("*zonas humanitarias de refugio*"). Civilian communities in the region have faced repeated death threats and human rights abuses committed by paramilitaries, security forces and guerrilla forces operating in the region. On 24 October, the body of Curvaradó River Basin community member Orlando Valencia was discovered in a nearby river. He had been shot in the head. He had reportedly been abducted by paramilitaries. Amnesty International has no information on any developments regarding criminal investigations into his death.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In recent years many Afro-descendant communities have sought to secure title over land on which their communities have lived for many years. Among these communities are those of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins. Despite securing land titles the communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó have faced repeated death threats from paramilitaries and the security forces. Paramilitaries have attempted to force the Afro-descendant communities to grow plantations of African Palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap, and have reportedly occupied some of their land. The relation between paramilitary threats and the cultivation of African Palm has been acknowledged by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organizations of American States and Office of the Human Rights Human Rights Ombudsman. On 15 March 2005, after being told of repeated death threats by paramilitaries operating with the support of the XVII Brigade, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) issued a resolution calling on the Colombian authorities to guarantee the safety of the communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó.

The present government of President Alvaro Uribe Vélez has been engaged in a process of dialogue with army-backed paramilitary groups. The main paramilitary umbrella organization, the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, declared a ceasefire in December 2002, but since then over 2,300 people have "disappeared" or been killed. Amnesty International is still documenting paramilitary human rights violations carried out in collusion with the security forces, in areas where paramilitary units have supposedly demobilized. Paramilitaries often kill those they label guerrilla collaborators; similarly guerrilla forces have killed numerous civilians they accuse of siding 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 inhabitants of the Afro-descendent communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins in Chocó Department, following threats of army-backed paramilitary incursions in the area;
- calling for all measures, deemed appropriate by these communities, to be taken to guarantee their safety in line with the repeated resolutions issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States the most recent on 15 March 2005;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Chocó, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the killing of Orlando Valencia;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with United Nations recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 337 5890**

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

Minister of the Interior and Justice

Sr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, Ministro del Interior y de Justicia, Ministerio del Interior

Av. Jiménez No 8-89, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 560 4630**

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

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán, Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,

Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)**

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental human rights organization

Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz, Calle 50, No13-19, Oficina 203, 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 27 January 2006.