

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 23/49/96

UA 230/96 "Disappearance" / Apparent extrajudicial executions /  
Fear for safety 1 October 1996

COLOMBIA Dibanil ORTEGA ORTEGA (f)  
Oliver ORTEGA ORTEGA, mining student  
Meri SANTIAGO (f)  
Ever SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ  
César VARGAS ROJAS  

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and others (names unknown)

In recent days a paramilitary group, "*Autodefensas Campesinas de Urabá y Córdoba*", "Peasant Farmer Self-Defence Groups of Urabá and Córdoba", is reported to have abducted at least 17 people from the communities of La Jagua de Ibérico, Becerril and Agustín Codazzi in the department of Cesar. Three have been found dead, heightening fears for those still missing and, as paramilitary activity continues in the area, for the safety of other members of the civilian population.

At about 11.30pm on 22 September 1996 a group of 20 gunmen, some wearing army uniforms, reportedly entered La Jagua de Ibérico and forced Dibanil Ortega Ortega and her son, Oliver Ortega Ortega, out of their home. The two were beaten, their identity documents were taken from them, and they were forcibly abducted.

A telephone call was reportedly received by relatives on 23 September from Dibanil informing them that she was well, but to date her whereabouts and that of her son remain unknown. Prior to their abduction the paramilitary group had pushed death threats under the doors of the houses of neighbours of the Ortega Ortega family, saying that members of the latter would be abducted as they were guerrilla collaborators.

During the raid, the paramilitary group repeatedly demanded to know the whereabouts of other members of the Ortega Ortega family, as well as a community leader, César Vargas Rojas. One community member, Meri Santiago, was reportedly beaten by the paramilitary group demanding to know where César Vargas was. She needed 10 stitches to her head following the beating. Another person, Ever Sánchez Sánchez, was also beaten during the raid and his identity document taken from him, raising concern for his safety. César Vargas, who was away from the community during the raid, has not returned to La Jagua de Ibérico out of fear for his life.

At least 15 other people from the communities of La Jagua de Ibérico, Becerril and Agustín Codazzi, whose names are not yet known to Amnesty International, are also reported to have been abducted. At least three of them have been found dead. One victim was found in Becerril on 23 September, another was found on the same day in La Jagua de Ibérico, and a third body was discovered in recent days in Agustín de Codazzi.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite repeated promises by President Ernesto Samper Pizano to improve the human rights situation in Colombia, members of the security forces together with their paramilitary allies continue to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity. His promises include a commitment to dismantle the paramilitary groups, but no steps have been taken to control their actions or to hold members accountable for widespread human rights violations.

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. 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, they 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.

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

- calling for immediate steps to establish the whereabouts of Dibanil and Oliver Ortega Ortega, missing since their abduction by a paramilitary group on 22 September in the community of Jagua de Ibérico, and of a number of other people abducted in the area around the same time;
- urging that, if they are in detention, they be treated humanely and allowed access to lawyers, relatives and medical treatment, and that they be charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released immediately;
- calling for immediate measures to guarantee the safety of the civilian population of La Jagua de Ibérico, Becerril and Agustín Codazzi, including Ever Sánchez Sánchez, César Vargas Rojas, Meri Santiago and other members of the Ortega Ortega family;
- calling for prompt, full and impartial investigation into the violations, including the reported killings of three others abducted, for the results to be made public, and those responsible to be brought to justice;

**if possible also:**

- call for full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Cesar and that those members of the security forces responsible for supporting such groups be brought to justice;
- urge the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with governmental commitments.

**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 1 289 3377/286 7434**

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

2) Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Valdivieso Sarmiento  
 Fiscal General de la Nación  
 Fiscalía General de la Nación  
 Calle 35 No. 4-31  
 Apartado Aéreo 29855

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams:Fiscal General Valdivieso, Fiscalía General, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Faxes:+ 57 1 287 0939; 288 2828**

**Salutation: Estimado Dr. Valdivieso/Dear Dr. Valdivieso**

3) 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 1874/288 4906**  
**Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister**

4) Advocate for the People:  
Dr. José Fernando Castro Caycedo  
Defensor del Pueblo  
Defensoría del Pueblo  
Calle 35 No. 7-25 piso 5  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Telegrams: Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoria del Pueblo, Bogota, Colombia**  
**Faxes: + 57 1 346 1225/285 6908/288 6683**  
**Salutation: Estimado Dr Caycedo/Dear Dr Caycedo**

**COPIES TO:**

Lawyers' Association:  
Corporación Colectivo de Abogados  
AA 44456, 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 23 November 1996.