

PUBLIC

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"Disappearances" / Fear for safety

18 July 2001

COLOMBIA

Reinaldo PARRA [m]

Yeimi CHITIVA [f]

Milton BECERRA [m]

Civilian population of the municipalities of El Líbano and Mariquita, Tolima department

Killed: Isabel GUZMAN [f], Luciano PARRA [m], Luz Mila RODRIGUEZ [f], Orlando ORTIZ [m], Hernando PARRA [m], Otoniel MURILLO [m], Ariel Maria PARRA [m]

Seven people have been killed and three have disappeared in Tolima department following an incursion of army-backed paramilitaries in the region. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of those who have disappeared, and for that of the civilian population of the municipalities of El Líbano and Mariquita.

Peasant farmers Renaldo Parra and Yeimi Chitiva were reportedly abducted near the town of Mariquita in northern Tolima on 10 July. Paramilitaries with the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia reportedly later claimed responsibility for the abduction in a telephone call to Renaldo Parra and Yeimi Chitiva's families. They promised to release the two farmers and asked their families to meet with them. On 16 July, eight relatives and community members reportedly met with the paramilitaries. Seven of them were apparently killed. The last member of the group, Milton Becerra, has not been seen since.

The "disappearances" and killings follow a paramilitary incursion in northern areas of Tolima department. On 15 July, paramilitaries apparently entered the communities of Pantanilla, Villanueva and El Bledo in the municipality of El Libano, near Mariquita, threatening and beating members of the communities. A young man's stomach was reportedly perforated after he was beaten with the barrel of a rifle.

In recent months, the civilian population in northern Tolima has reportedly also been repeatedly threatened by people thought to belong to the Batallón Patriotas of the Colombian Army, who are operating in the area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Members of the Colombian army and security forces and their paramilitary allies commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. In the last five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. So far this year the United Nations Human Rights Office in Colombia has received information of 26 massacres committed in 11 departments, in which more than 170 people have been killed, mostly by paramilitary groups.

The Colombian government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989, yet they continue to work with the support of the security forces - by action or omission - in many areas of the country. Guerrilla forces have also carried out numerous killings and other violations of international humanitarian law against members of peasant, black, and indigenous communities, whom they accuse of collaborating with the security forces or paramilitary groups.

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

- urging the authorities to take all necessary measures to establish the whereabouts of Reinaldo Parra, Yeimi Chitiva and Milton Becerra, and to secure their release unharmed;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation to be carried out into their abduction and "disappearance";

- urging the authorities to do everything necessary to guarantee the safety of the civilian population in northern areas of Tolima department;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the reported killing of the seven people named above, and the reported paramilitary threats against and beatings of the civilian population of El Líbano;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in northern areas of the department of Tolima, 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 take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:President of Colombia:

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 336 2109 / 565 8566

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Pastrana

Minister of Defence

Gustavo Bell Lemus, Ministro de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telexes: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Faxes: + 57 1 221 9088

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Gobernador del Departamento de Tolima

Sr. Guillermo Alfonso Jaramillo Martínez
Gobernación de Tolima
Calle 10 y 11, Carrera 3
Ibagué, Tolima, COLOMBIA

Salutation: Dear Governor / Sr. Gobernador

Fax: + 57 82 638588

COPIES TO:Non-governmental human rights organization

Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos (CSPP)
(Apartado Aéreo 22803)
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 29 August 2001.