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14 November 2003

Further Information on 50/03 (AMR 23/20/2003, 21 February 2003) and follow-up (AMR 23/053/2003, 6 August 2003) - Fear for safety

COLOMBIA Wilson David Higuita (m)

Gildardo Tuberquia (m) | 1 community leaders

Other members of the Peace Community of Paz San José de Apartadó, Antioquia

department

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the members of the *Paz San José de Apartadó*, San José de Apartadó Peace Community in Antioquia department, following recent death threats made by army-backed paramilitaries.

According to reports, at 5pm on 31 October, four army-backed paramilitary gunmen stopped a public bus on which members of the peace community were travelling, as it passed through an area known as Tierra Amarilla, on the road between the municipality of San José de Apartadó and the municipal capital Apartadó. The gunmen forced all the passengers off the bus and made them show their identity documents. The paramilitaries reportedly threatened the passengers, saying that their names sounded like the names of guerrillas and that they looked fit to be killed ("estaban buenos para matarlos"). They allegedly asked the passengers to show their hands, purportedly so that the paramilitaries could check if they had hands of guerrillas or workers. The passengers were reportedly told that if their hands looked like guerrillas' hands, they would be killed. They also reportedly told the passengers that they should be reassured that the paramilitaries were around to kill anyone strange or threatening. Following the threats, the armed paramilitaries allowed the members of the peace community to get on the bus and to continue their journey.

A similar incident had taken place in the same area on the previous day, when eight army-backed paramilitaries identified themselves as members of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia also threatened passengers on a bus.

Such paramilitary activity is taking place despite the strong presence of the Colombian army in the surrounding area. According to local sources, on 20 October military forces carried out indiscriminate bombardments which forced inhabitants of several hamlets belonging to the Peace Community to flee their homes. Many of these people have fled to San José de Apartadó. There have also been reports of thefts carried out by members of the military in the hamlets of the community. There is no further information on community leaders Wilson David Higuita and Gildardo Tuberquia, who were accused by the Colombian army of being guerrilla collaborators earlier this year.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó was created in 1997 in an effort by the civilian population to call on warring factions to respect their right as civilians not to be drawn into Colombia's long-running conflict. Both the security forces and their paramilitary allies on the one hand and *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia guerrilla forces on the other have accused the members of the community of cooperating with their enemies. These accusations have been followed by repeated death threats against members of the Peace Community and the killing and "disappearance" of over 70 members of the Peace Community, the vast majority committed by the security forces and their paramilitary allies.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, and insisting that all measures deemed appropriate by the members of the community themselves are taken to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that the Colombian authorities should continue to respect the right of the civilian population not to be drawn into the conflict and so respect the right of San José de Apartadó not to be militarized:
- expressing concern at the continued death threats made by army-backed paramilitaries and the presence of army-backed paramilitaries on the road between San José de Apartadó and Apartadó, despite the heavy military presence in the region;
- urging the authorities to take immediate decisive action to confront and dismantle these groups, in line with repeated United Nations recommendations.
- calling for full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary forces in Antioquia department, 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.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26

Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 342 0592/ 337 58 90

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. Luis Camilo Osorio,

Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,

Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite),

Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 570 2022 / 2017 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Dear Dr. Osorio / Estimado Dr. Osorio

COPIES TO:

National Advocate for the people

Sr. Volmar Antonio Pérez Ortiz, Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo,

Calle 55, No. 10-32/46 oficina 301,

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 26 December 2003