

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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COLOMBIA: Extra-judicial Execution

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At least twenty members of the Paez Indigenous community occupying a property called "El Nilo", near the town of Caloto in Cauca department were killed by unidentified gunmen on the evening of 16 December 1991.

According to eyewitness testimony, some 60 heavily armed and hooded men dressed in military style uniform burst into a building where the Paez community was holding a religious feast. Some people present were killed outright as the gunmen opened fire; others were first bound with their hands behind their backs and made to lie face down on the ground before being shot in the back of the head. At least twenty people, including six women and four children, died in the attack; a further ten were badly wounded. The community's ranches and crops were burned by the gunmen.

The Paez community had occupied "El Nilo" ranch, which they claim falls within their "Huellas" resguardo or reservation, over four years ago in an attempt to recover the community's traditional lands, assigned and titled to the community during the period of Spanish colonization of Colombia. Their claims to the lands have been contested by successive owners, although no ruling has so far been made on the rival claims by the Colombian land agency Incora or the courts. En July 1991 the Indian organization *Consejo Regional Indigena del Cauca*, (CRIC) denounced to the Regional Procurator

and the Mayor of Caloto acts of intimidation, harassment and threats against the indigenous community of Huellas from persons representing a would-be owner of the property. As far as Amnesty International is aware, no steps were taken by the authorities to investigate the threats or to protect the community from further abuse.

On visiting the scene of the massacre, President César (accent on e) Gaviria said he would convene a commission of officials from the judiciary and criminal justice department to investigate the killings. Indian leader José (accent on e) Narcsco Jamioy, a member of the Colombian Congress, announced the creation of a Congressional commission of inquiry into the massacre.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Despite repeated pledges by the government of President César Gaviria Trujillo to protect human rights, Amnesty International continues to receive reports of widespread political killings and "disappearances" committed by members of the Colombian armed forces and paramilitary forces associated with them. Although paramilitary groups were declared illegal in 1989 and some have since demobilized, many such groups continue to operate and to commit serious abuses with virtual impunity particularly in heavily militarized zones. Principal targets have been people associated with trade unions, civic and community movements, members of legal left-wing parties and human rights activists. Members of Indigenous communities involved in land disputes have also been among the victims of human rights violations committed by paramilitary forces, whose activities have been supported or tolerated by the Colombian armed forces and, in some cases, local authorities. Only exceptionally have investigations of human rights violations led to the trial and conviction of those responsible. Witnesses to human rights violations have themselves frequently been killed or "disappeared" before they have been able to testify.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- Expressing concern at the killing of 20 members of the Paez Indigenous community in Cauca department reportedly by paramilitary forces;
- expressing concern at the failure of the regional authorities to investigate complaints of threats and harassment against members of the Paez Indigenous community;
- urging there be an immediate inquiry into their deaths, the results of which should be made public, and that those responsible should be brought to justice and punished;
- urging the authorities to take measures to protect the surviving members of the "Huellas" community and ensure they are able to testify without fear of reprisals.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic:
Señor Presidente César Gaviria Trujillo
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño

Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegrams: Presidente Gaviria, Bogota,
Colombia**

Telexes: 44281 PALP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 283 3066

+ 57 1 286 7324

+ 57 1 287 7937

[Salutation: Señor Presidente/Dear President Gaviria]

Procurator General:

Dr. Carlos Gustavo Arrieta Padilla

Procurador General de la Nación

Procuraduría General

Edificio Banco Ganadero

Carrera 5, No. 15-80

Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Procurador General Arrieta, Bogota, Colombia

Telexes: 41224 PRGEN CO or 41213 PGNDP CO

Faxes: + 57 1 284 0472

[Salutation: Estimado Dr./Dear Dr. Arrieta]

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Advocate for the People:

Dr Jaime Córdoba Triviño

Defensor del Pueblo

Procuraduría General

Edificio Banco Ganadero

Carrera 5, No. 15-80

Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

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[Salutation: Estimado Dr./Dear Dr Tiviño]

Minister of Justice

Fernando Carillo

Ministero de Justicia

Ministerio de Justicia

Carrera 15, No. 6-40, Of. 308

Bogotá D.E., Colombia

Telegrams: Ministerio de Justicia Carillo, Bogotá D.E.,

Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 288 4906

[Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister]

Minister of the Interior

Dr Humberto de la Calle Lombana

Ministero de Gobierno

Ministerio de Gobierno

Calle 13 No. 8-38, Of. 304

Bogotá D.E., Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Gobierno Lombana, Bogotá D.E.,
Telexes: 45406 MINGO CO
[Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister]

Colombia

COPIES TO:

Human Rights and Educational Organization
Señores
CINEP
AA 25916
Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat or your section office if sending appeals after 31 January 1992.