

PUBLIC

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18 December 2003

UA 367/03 Fear for safety/ Death threats

COLOMBIA **Civilian inhabitants of the communities of Las Pavas, Laureles, Dantas, Coello, Ibagué Municipality, department of Tolima**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of civilian communities in the River Cocora Canyon in the municipality of Ibagué, department of Tolima, who have been threatened with attack by army-backed paramilitaries.

On 5 November soldiers reportedly searched three houses in the community of Dantas. During the search they reportedly said to one of the inhabitants, "*Usted todavía por aquí... nosotros no le vamos a hacer nada pero detrás vienen los otros que ellos si lo van a matar*". ("You still here? ... we aren't going to do anything to you but those who are coming after us are going to kill you.")

In mid-November local people reported that paramilitary groups had set up a base close to the neighbouring community of Las Pavas, and were threatening to attack Dantas. At the same time graffiti of the army-backed *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), United Self-defence Forces of Colombia, appeared in the community of Coello, which is situated in an area which allows access to the River Cocora Canyon.

Fear for the safety of the inhabitants of the communities of Dantas, Las Pavas, Coello and neighbouring community of Laureles, is heightened by the fact that in early November at least four peasant farmers were killed by paramilitaries in the nearby municipality of Cajamarca. According to press reports the regional office of the human rights ombudsman (*Defensoría del Pueblo*) asserted that the security forces may have been involved in the killings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Civilian communities in conflict zones are frequently labelled "guerrilla collaborators" by the security forces and their paramilitary allies, who often follow these accusations with serious human rights violations. Paramilitaries have often raided communities that have been threatened despite repeated calls on the Colombian authorities to guarantee their safety. Local people have reportedly attempted to alert regional authorities in the departmental capital, Ibagué and at national level human rights organizations have alerted the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman.

A transport infrastructure project is reportedly being developed in the area of the River Cocora Canyon. Civilians living in such areas of economic interest have frequently been labelled subversive, and then been forced off their lands by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. Guerrilla forces have also threatened and killed civilians in conflict zones whom they accuse of collaborating with 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 civilian communities near the River Cocora in the municipality of Ibagué, department of Tolima, including Las Pavas, Coello, Dantas, and Laureles, which have been threatened with attack by paramilitary forces;

- urging the authorities to ensure that all measures deemed appropriate by the communities are taken to guarantee their safety;

-calling for full and impartial investigations into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Tolima, urging that the results are made public and that 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 United Nations recommendations.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26

Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 337 58 90 /342 0592

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

Minister of Defence

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Jorge Alberto Uribe Echavarría

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52 OFI. 217

Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN)

Bogotá, COLOMBIA

Fax: + 57 1 266 0193

Salutation: Dear Sir/Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

'José Alvear Restrepo' Lawyers' Collective

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AA 33035

Bogotá, Colombia

Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman

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 30 January 2004.