

UA 325/00

Fear for Safety/Possible "Disappearances"

25 October

COLOMBIA Ramón AGUILÚ GAITÁN  
Nelson AGUILÚ GAITÁN  
Pedro PABLO  
Ramón ENCINOSA DÍAZ, aged 17  
Yineth ALVARADO (f)  
Ferney N. RÍOS, aged 15

**At least 14 other young people aged 13-25 from the municipality of Puerto Gaitán,  
Meta department**

**Forcibly displaced people in Villavicencio, Meta department, and members of  
the church-run organisation *Pastoral Social* that is helping them**

Army-backed paramilitaries have reportedly abducted at least 20 young people, listed above, and according to some reports may be planning to forcibly recruit them. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for their safety.

They were apparently abducted between 20 and 23 October by paramilitary groups operating in the municipality of Puerto Gaitán, in the central department of Meta. All are aged between 13 and 25. They were reportedly beaten, forced on to trucks and driven to a nearby farm, *El Brasil*, which is thought to be a paramilitary base and training camp.

Peasant farmers who have fled their homes in rural Meta department to escape political violence and sought shelter in the departmental capital, Villavicencio, are also under attack. There are reports that paramilitaries have recently killed at least four members of the displaced communities, who are sheltering in the Ciudad Porfía, San Carlos El Rodeo, and El Milagro districts of the city. Paramilitaries are reported to be planning an attack in the Ciudad Porfía district.

Forcibly displaced people have frequently been accused of being guerrilla sympathizers or collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. These accusations have often been followed by death threats and serious human rights violations. Organizations working with displaced communities have also been targeted, and members of an organization run by the Catholic Church, *Pastoral Social*, that provides food and shelter to those displaced in Villavicencio are believed to be in danger.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The issue of forced displacement has highlighted the human rights crisis in Colombia. Displaced communities have often suffered serious human rights violations at the hands of the security forces and their paramilitary allies, who are trying to silence them and prevent them from bringing their plight to international attention.

The Colombian army and security forces, and their paramilitary allies, commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. Over the past five years, several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups. The Colombian government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations and in 1989 issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups, yet they continue to operate with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

Similarly, armed opposition groups have committed serious violations of international humanitarian law. They have executed people, including members of forcibly displaced communities, whom they accuse of collaborating with, or supporting, the security forces or paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern for the 20 people reportedly abducted by paramilitaries in the municipality of Puerto Gaitán, whose whereabouts remain unknown;
- urging the authorities to do everything possible to determine their whereabouts and guarantee their safety;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into their "disappearance", for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by those under threat to guarantee the safety of displaced people in Ciudad Porfía and other districts of Villavicencio, as well as members of *Pastoral Social*;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Meta, urging that the results are made public, and that those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and decisive action to combat and dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and United Nations recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana Arango  
Presidente de la República

Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax:+ 571 286 7434/6842/ 287 7939/ 284 2186/ 289 3377/ 337 1351**

**Salutation:Dear President / Excmo. Sr Presidente**

Vice-President of the Republic

Señor Vicepresidente Gustavo Bell Lemus

Alto Consejero Presidencial para asuntos de Derechos Humanos y lucha Contra la Corrupción

Cra. 8 #7-26, Palacio de Nariño, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax:+ 571 337 1351**

**Salutation:Dear Vice-President / Excmo. Sr Vicepresidente**

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña

Ministro de Defensa Nacional, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional

Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

**Telegram: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia**

**Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO**

**Fax:+ 571 222 1874**

**Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro**

**COPIES TO:**

National Advocate for the People

Sr. Eduardo Cifuentes

Defensor del Pueblo, Defensoría del Pueblo

Calle 55, No. 10-32/46, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para Refugiados (ACNUR)  
Calle 114 No.9-01 Edificio Teleport Torre A Oficina 601  
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

**Please raise these concerns with your own government. Urge your government to publicly condemn these abductions and to monitor the efforts of the Colombian government to ensure that they are fully investigated, those responsible are brought to justice and action is taken to combat paramilitary groups in the region.**

Since displaced communities in Villavicencio are receiving support from the European Union's European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), it would be especially useful for EU citizens to write to their governments.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 December 2000.