

5 November 1998

Further information on UA 176/98 (AMR 23/40/98, 12 June 1998) and follow-ups (AMR 23/49/98, 1 July 1998; AMR 23/58/98, 7 August 1998 and AMR 23/86/98, 3 November 1998) - Fear for safety / Possible extrajudicial execution / Possible "disappearance"

COLOMBIA Civilian population of the municipality of San Pablo, and other communities in the south of Bolívar Department

new concerns: regional leaders of forcibly displaced community

The discovery of the graves, in the municipality of San Pablo, Southern Bolívar, believed to contain the bodies of three community leaders abducted by paramilitary forces four days ago, has raised concerns that paramilitary forces intend to carry out their threat to kill other community leaders of the displaced population.

Additional reports indicate the recent arrival of heavily armed paramilitaries on the river Magdalena, opposite the town on San Pablo. This has forced residents once again to flee their homes. The recent withdrawal of the security forces from the region has meant that rural areas of the municipality of San Pablo are now under sole paramilitary control.

The situation serves to demonstrate the continuing failure by the authorities to honour their commitment to combat paramilitary groups operating in South Bolívar or to guarantee the safety of community representatives involved in negotiating recent agreements with the Colombian Government in this regard. In addition, no attempt by the authorities to investigate the "disappearances" or to guarantee the safety of the civilian population are known to have been made.

The identities of the four leaders seized at the paramilitary road block on 30 October are now known to be Oscar Danilo Zais Peña, Martín Mejía, Neider José García and Valdirris Chamorro. Confirmation of the identities of those found dead has not been possible due to the continuing presence of paramilitary forces. No information has been obtained concerning the whereabouts of the fourth person abducted.

Please continue appeals as in the most recent update taking into account the above information and, if possible:

- expressing concern that the authorities continue to take no action to protect the civilian population of the South Bolívar region or to fulfill government commitments to create a special forces unit to combat paramilitaries in the region;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee the safety of the leaders of the displaced communities of southern Bolívar Department, particularly those involved in the recent negotiations with the government in Barrancabermeja to ensure the safe return of the displaced communities and the removal of paramilitary forces operating in the area;
- requesting the authorities provide sufficient security to allow the exhumation of the three bodies discovered on 3 November 1998 in the municipality of San Pablo, Southern Bolívar, so that they may be identified.

Additional address:

Regional Military Commander

Coronel Hector Eduardo Peña
Batallón 45, "Héroes de Majagual"
Barrancabermeja
Santander Department
Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante de Batallón 45, "Héroes de Majagual", Barrancabermeja,
Colombia

Salutation: Sr. Coronel Peña / Dear Commander Peña

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or
your section office, if sending appeals after 16 December 1998.