

21 December 2000

Further information on UA 299/00 (AMR 23/78/00, 26 September 2000) - Fear for Safety / Possible "Disappearances"

COLOMBIA civilian populations of the Cimitarra River Valley in the Magdalena Medio region including Eduardo AMARIS PEREZ and five peasant farmers (feared to have "disappeared")

Paramilitaries allied to the armed forces have forced over 50 families to leave their homes in the heavily militarized Magdalena Medio region in central Colombia. The armed forces have consistently failed to protect the civilian population of the region, and Amnesty International fears for their safety.

In the last two weeks a group of about 200 paramilitaries have entered the hamlets of La Esperanza, Chaparral, Coroncoro, El Caguí, Isla No Hay Como Dios, Sepulturas, Lejanías, Cuatrobocas, San Lorenzo, Palagua and Patio Bonito, municipality of Cantagallo, in the the Cimitarra river valley, a tributary of the Magdalena river. On 4 December they reportedly destroyed supplies for a cooperative organized by the *Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra* (ACVC), Peasant Farmers' Association of the Cimitarra River Valley.

Two army helicopters were reportedly overhead during the raids, together with one civilian helicopter which is known to be used by paramilitaries. It is of concern that the army and the paramilitaries were apparently working together.

Fighting between guerrilla and paramilitary forces in the area has reportedly led to some of the civilian population to flee to the city of Barrancabermeja.

The paramilitaries have now reportedly set up a base in the El Caguí hamlet, in Cantagallo municipality, Bolívar department, despite the heavy presence of the security forces in the region. There is a paramilitary checkpoint at La Rompida, in the nearby municipality of Yondó, Antioquia department, near the Barrancabermeja naval base. It is reportedly still operating despite national and international condemnation of its existence to the Colombian authorities. Another paramilitary checkpoint is reportedly operating at El Tigre, near the counter-insurgency Battalion 45 "Heroes of Majagual", *Batallón 45 "Héroes de Majagual"*, base (see UA 271, AMR 23/069/00).

Amnesty International has received no further news on the whereabouts of Eduardo Amaris Pérez and five other peasant farmers feared to have "disappeared".

The authorities have taken no decisive action to confront or dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area, or to bring military personnel who work with paramilitary forces to justice, despite numerous reports of paramilitary activity in the area in recent months and despite the close proximity of the naval base.

The Colombian armed forces and their paramilitary allies commit serious human rights violations with virtual impunity. In the last five years several thousand civilians have been killed by paramilitary groups, who continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country despite the government making it illegal to set up paramilitary organizations, and issuing directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups in 1989.

Guerrilla forces have also committed serious human rights abuses, including executions of people they accuse of collaborating with the security forces or paramilitaries.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the communities of La Esperanza, Chaparral, Coroncoro, El Caguí, Isla No Hay Como Dios, Sepulturas, Lejanías, Cuatrobocas, San Lorenzo, Palagua and Patio Bonito in the municipality of Cantagallo, and urging the authorities to take immediate and effective measures to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that paramilitary checkpoints are still operating at La Rompida, near the Barrancabermeja naval base, and at El Tigre, near the counter-insurgency Battalion 45 "Heroes of Majagual" military base, and at the permanent paramilitary base in the El Caguí hamlet, municipality of Cantagallo;
- expressing concern that two army helicopters were reportedly operating together with a helicopter used by paramilitaries, in an area with a strong security force presence;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the Magdalena Medio region, 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

Faxes: + 571 286 7434 / 287 7939 / 284 2186 / 289 3377 / 337 1351

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr Presidente

Minister of Interior

Dr. Humberto de la Calle

Ministro del Interior

Ministerio del Interior, Palacio Echeverry

Carrera 8a, No.8-09, piso 2o.

Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 57 1 286 8025/284 0214

Salutation: Dear Sir / Sr Ministro

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

Faxes: + 571 222 1874

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

Non governmental organisation

Asociación Campesina del Valle del Río Cimitarra (ACVC), Peasant Farmers' Association of the Cimitarra River Valley
Calle 47 N°6-108, Of.202
Barrancabermeja, Santander, 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 1 February 2001.