

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

13 April 2005

COLOMBIA **Afro-descendant inhabitants in the Cacarica River Basin, Ríosucio Municipality, department of Chocó**

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Afro-descendant inhabitants in the Cacarica River Basin, Ríosucio Municipality, department of Chocó after receiving information that army-backed paramilitaries have threatened to enter their communities. In recent years paramilitary forces operating with the support of the security forces have been responsible for serious human rights violations against members of these communities.

At 7pm on 10 April, around 300 paramilitaries were reportedly seen in La Loma, which is at the entrance to the Cacarica River Basin. They then reportedly moved to an area known as Bijao Cacarica where they reportedly told inhabitants that they were preparing to attack the *"zonas humanitarias"*, "humanitarian zones". These are hamlets clearly defined by the civilian inhabitants as civilian areas. The inhabitants have repeatedly asserted their right not to be drawn into the conflict by calling on combatants in the area whether guerrilla forces, the armed forces or their paramilitary allies not to enter the humanitarian zones.

On 11 April, a message from the paramilitaries was reportedly received in the hamlet of Nueva Esperanza en Dios demanding that community leaders should go and talk to them: *"necesitamos a los coordinadores de esas Zonas Humanitarias, o vienen por las buenas o vamos a tener que ir a las malas"*, "we need the coordinators of the Humanitarian Zones to come voluntarily or they will be forced to come". The arrival of paramilitaries in the area near to one of the hamlets of Nueva Esperanza en Dios follows the withdrawal of members of the XVII Brigade from the immediate surroundings. Troops had maintained a presence close to the community's perimeter until approximately 10 days earlier. Before the troops withdrew, one soldier reportedly told inhabitants that paramilitaries would be arriving in the area.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Between 2000 and 2001 the Afro-descendant inhabitants of the communities in the Cacarica River Basin area resettled on their land after they were forced to flee their homes in the wake of joint paramilitary-military operations in the region in early 1997. In the past, they came under frequent attack after being labeled guerrilla collaborators by the security forces and their paramilitary allies, and security force/paramilitary collaborators by the guerrilla. The Cacarica communities insist that their right as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict and that combatants whether members of the armed forces, their paramilitary allies or guerrilla forces remain outside their "humanitarian zones" have resulted in repeated threats and human rights abuses the vast majority committed by paramilitaries. Guerrilla forces operating in the department of Chocó have also been responsible for killing and threatening civilians they accuse of collaborating with their enemies. (See UA 136/01, AMR 23/055/2001, 4 June 2001 and follow-ups).

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:**

- expressing serious concern for the safety of the returned displaced communities in the Cacarica River Basin area, following the reported arrival of a large contingent of paramilitary forces despite reports that XVII Brigade troops were still in the area;
- urging the authorities to take all measures that the communities themselves deem appropriate to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Chocó, despite repeated commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups;

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the department of Chocó, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 337 5890**

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

Vice-President

Vicepresidente de la República de Colombia

Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón

Vicepresidencia, Carrera 8A No 5-57, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 565 7682**

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

Commander of the XVII Brigade of the Colombian Army

General Fandiño Ricón Héctor Jaime

Carepa, Urabá, Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante XVII Brigada, Carepa, Urabá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 4 823 6844 (if someone answers say “me da tono de fax por favor para General Fandiño por favor”)**

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental human rights organization

Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz

Calle 50 No13-19 Oficina 203

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 25 May 2005.