

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 44/05/97

8 May 1997

Further information on EXTRA 50/97 (AMR 44/01/97, 4 April 1997) and follow-up (AMR 44/04/97, 21 April) - Fear of refoulement / Fear for safety

PANAMA

- Rosaira Velez Domico (f)
- Amalia Borgas Velez (f)
- Maria Dellanira Borgas Velez (f)
- Maria Margarita Borgas Velez (f)
- Maria Cladibel Guizao (child)
- Hildardo Antonio Guizao (child)
- Deisy Luz Guizao (child)
- Davinson Jose Muentes Vargas (child)
- Jose Muentes Fuentes (m)
- Euclides Osorio Fuentes (m)
- Luis Gomez (m)
- Luis Manoles (m)

Refugee peasant farmers from the Urabá region of Colombia

The 12 refugee peasant farmers named above, who fled from the Urabá region of Colombia in April 1997, may be forcibly returned to Colombia where their physical safety would be at risk.

Luis Gomez and Luis Manoles were detained on 22 April by Panamanian police in Boca de Cupe, a town on the border with Colombia. The other 10 were detained by Panamanian police on 25 April in El Real, also near the border. According to information received by Amnesty International, they are going to be forcibly deported to Colombia.

The 12 refugees had been in hiding since April, when over 200 Colombian refugees, who had fled to Panama to escape the violence in their home region of north-west Colombia, were forcibly deported by the Panamanian authorities in coordination with Colombian authorities (see original EXTRA and previous update).

The forced return of these refugees occurred immediately after the Panamanian authorities had given assurances to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that they would not undertake any precipitous action and would allow a UNHCR mission into the area to assess the refugees' situation.

The returned refugees are being given temporary accommodation at the "El Cacique" farm in Bahia Solano, on Colombia's north-west Pacific coast, in the province of Chocó. The refugees told independent organizations of their continuing fears for the safety of their leaders. They also confirmed that they were forcibly deported by the Panamanian authorities who gave them 72 hours to board Colombian Air Force helicopters.

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which Panama has ratified, specifically states that no one may be deported to a country where he or she could face grave human rights abuses.

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

- reminding the authorities of Panama's obligation under the international principle of *non-refoulement*, that is, not to forcibly return anyone to a country where he or she would be at risk of serious human rights violations, referring to Article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Panama is a state party;
- urging the Panamanian authorities to take all appropriate and necessary steps to ensure the safety and well-being of the Colombian refugees on its territory.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of the Republic

S.E. Ernesto Pérez Balladares
Presidente de la República
Palacio Presidencial
Valija 50, Panamá 1, REPUBLICA DE PANAMA
Telegrams: Presidente Balladares, Panamá
Telexes: 2770 PRESIPA PG
Faxes: + 507 2 27-6818
Salutation: Sr. Presidente/Dear President

2) Minister of Government and Justice

Sr. Raúl Montenegro
Ministro de Gobierno y Justicia
Ministerio de Gobierno y Justicia
Apartado 1628, Panamá 1, REPUBLICA DE PANAMA
Telegrams: Ministro de Gobierno y Justicia, Panamá
Telexes: 2746
Faxes: + 507 2 12-0372
Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister

3) Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dr. Ricardo Alberto Arias
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
C. 34 Plaza Porras, Panamá 4, REPUBLICA DE PANAMA
Telegrams: Ministro de relaciones Exteriores, Panamá
Telex: 2771 EXTPAN PG
Faxes: + 507 2 11-0416
Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

1) Human Rights Organization

Srs Centro de Investigación de los Derechos Humanos y Socorro Jurídico de Panamá
Apartado Postal 10215, Panamá 4, PANAMA
Faxes: +507 2 23 2595

2) Human Rights Organization

Sres Asociación Regional para Las Migraciones Forzadas
Apartado 862 - C.P. 2050 San Pedro de Montes de Oca
San José, Costa Rica
Fax: 506 255 0733

and to diplomatic representatives of Panama accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 June 1997.