

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety / death threats

16 March 2001

COLOMBIA

Civilian inhabitants of the community of El Paraíso,
department of Bolívar

Paramilitaries have threatened to massacre the civilian population in the community of El Paraíso in Simití municipality, department of Bolívar. Amnesty International is concerned for its safety.

A group of paramilitaries, who apparently operate alongside two army battalions with the V Brigade of the Colombian Army, *Battallón Guanes* and *Héroes del Majagual*, have threatened the inhabitants of El Paraíso. They reportedly said to them that "when the army leaves the PARAMILITARIES will massacre all the inhabitants of El Paraíso" ("*cuando el ejército se vaya van a venir los "PARAMILITARES a masacrar a todos los habitantes del Paraíso"*").

The community is currently surrounded by the Colombian Army. In the past, the army has often pulled out in advance of paramilitary attacks, despite having been warned thereof, or has failed to take action even when maintaining a strong presence in an area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the first few weeks of 2001 the United Nations Human Rights Office in Colombia has received information about 26 massacres committed in 11 departments, in which more than 170 people have been killed, most of them by paramilitary groups. Members of the Colombian army and security 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.

In February 2000, 200 paramilitary gunmen raided the village of El Salado also in Bolívar department, killing 36 people, including a six-year-old child. Many victims were tied to a table in the village sports field and subjected to torture, including rape, before they were stabbed or shot dead. A Marine Infantry unit reportedly set up a roadblock on the road to the village, preventing humanitarian organizations from getting through.

In 1989 the Colombian government suspended the constitutional legal base for the formation of paramilitary organizations, and issued directives to the armed forces to combat and disband such groups. However, they continue to work with the support of the security forces in many areas of the country.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the inhabitants of El Paraíso, department of Bolívar, after paramilitaries have threatened to massacre the civilian population in the area;
- urging the authorities to do everything necessary to guarantee their safety, reminding them that their failure to do so will be seen as the complicity of the security forces and paramilitary groups;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Simití municipality, department of Bolívar, 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 action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated 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: + 57 1 336 2109 / 337 1351

Salutation: Dear President / Excmo. Sr. Presidente

Attorney General

Dr. Alfonso Gómez Méndez,
Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación,
Diagonal 22B 5201, Apartado Aéreo 29855, Santafé de Bogotá
COLOMBIA

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Bogotá, Colombia

Faxes: + 571 570 2022 (If the call is answered, say "Fax, por favor" and wait for the signal.)

Salutation: Estimado Dr. / Dear Dr. Gómez Méndez

Commander of the V Brigade

Comandante de la V Brigada
General Martín Orlando Carreño Sandoval
Calle 14, Carrera 33
Bucaramanga, Santander,
COLOMBIA

Faxes: +57 76 359 189 / 334 390

Salutation: Dear Commander / Sr. Commandante

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental Organization

Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'
Apartado Aéreo 33035
Santafé de 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 27 April 2001.