

URGENT ACTION

OVER 300 DISPLACED DUE TO PARAMILITARY INCURSION

An incursion by paramilitaries and subsequent armed confrontation between them and guerrilla groups forced a mass displacement of families and the potential confinement of surrounding communities in Peña Azul, Chocó department, in north-western Colombia. The increase in paramilitary activity in the area is placing residents of rural areas of Chocó department at risk.

On 4 March, some 200 armed persons identified by the Ombudsperson's regional office as members of the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC) entered the town of Peña Azul in the municipality of Alto Baudó, Chocó department, in north-western Colombia. Witnesses told Amnesty International that a number of paramilitaries came looking for members of the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN). Consequently, 399 people from 128 families from the community were forced to flee out of fear for their lives. A community member told local media that in the middle of the raids, he could hear the bursts of fire in the mountains and someone shouting the insults "guerrilla rats, shit communists, we're going to bust them".

The whereabouts of eight families from Peña Azul remains unknown. According to Luis Murillo, regional representative of the Ombudsperson's Office, the other displaced people arrived at Pie de Pato in the urban zone of Alto Baudó, where the municipality is currently providing humanitarian aid.

Luis Murillo stated that "the conditions to support this already vulnerable Afro-descendant population are very limited as there is no integrated response from the government to protect the community". He affirmed that his Office has repeatedly raised concerns about the high risks that this population has faced since 2009, but told Amnesty International the situation has worsened in the past couple of months. According to the national NGO CIEDERPAZ that works in the area, nearby communities are possibly confined to the hamlets of Boca de Apartadó, Boca de León, Geandó, Punta Peña, Bacal, Amparrado and Cocalito due to these events.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of rural communities Chocó department, given the increase in incursions by paramilitary groups into the area and the continuing presence of other illegal armed groups,
- Urging the authorities to implement protection measures and a safe return or relocation in strict accordance with the wishes of those communities under threat;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 17 APRIL 2017 TO:

President

Señor Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631

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

Unit for the Victims Assistance and Reparation Director

Señor Alan Edmundo Jara Urzola
 Director de la Unidad de Víctimas
 Calle 16 # 6-66. Edificio Avianca Piso 19
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 4261111

Salutation: Dear Sir

And copies to:

Defensoría del pueblo
 Carrera 9 No.16 - 21
 Bogotá D.C., Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 314 73 00

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country: HIS EXCELLENCY MR NESTOR OSORIO, Embassy of Colombia, 3 Hans Crescent SW1X 0LN, 020 7589 9177 / 020 7589 5037, Fax 020 7581 1829, egranbretana@cancilleria.gov.co, www.colombianembassy.co.uk, **Salutation: Your Excellency**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since 2014 the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC), remnants of the paramilitary groups demobilized a decade ago, initiated an operation to take control of Alto Baudó, a territory populated by Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities near the Pacific Ocean, and other municipalities of the region.

Since then, there have been massive displacements of vulnerable populations, especially Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, including children. "It is a systematic situation of human rights violations," said Luis Murillo, regional representative of the Ombudsperson's Office, who asserted that the Office has been warning the authorities about this problem for years without the authorities encouraging "substantive solutions".

Since 21 February in the municipality of Bajo San Juan, also in Chocó department, approximately 106 Indigenous people (32 families) from the Chagpien Tordó reserve have moved to the town of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca department, as a result of clashes between the armed forces and illegal armed groups. According to a report from the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), families who did not move have mobility restrictions and four minor women are at risk of being forcibly recruited by either paramilitaries or the ELN. The constitutional court has ruled that the Colombian government must provide information and effective protection measures to the displaced communities as well as those in confinement.

Since the start of the peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), and especially since September 2015, there have been increasing reports of paramilitary activity in the Alto Baudó region. Increasing paramilitary activity has also been reported in other parts of the country, as various armed groups seek to gain control over some of the territories previously controlled by the FARC including the National Army of Liberation (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN), which is currently negotiating a peace agreement with the Colombian government.