

URGENT ACTION

PARAMILITARY INCURSION IN HUMANITARIAN ZONE

A group of paramilitaries entered the Humanitarian Zone of Nueva Esperanza en Dios in the Cacarica river basin in north-west Colombia looking for several individuals which they claimed were on a death list. The increase in paramilitary activity in the area is placing residents of the Humanitarian Zone and those accompanying them at risk.

In the morning of 12 February, eight armed paramilitaries dressed in black, some of whom were hooded, entered the **Afro-descendant Humanitarian Zone of Nueva Esperanza en Dios** in Riosucio Municipality, Chocó Department. Witnesses claim that an indeterminate number of paramilitaries are also present in the vicinity of the Humanitarian Zone. According to local residents, the paramilitaries, who apparently belong to the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC), searched every house in the community, including one used by the NGO **Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission** (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz), which accompanies the community, looking for a group of people who the paramilitaries said were on a death list. They said that if they could not find them they would return the following day. The paramilitaries left the Humanitarian Zone after a few hours. While in the Humanitarian Zone, the paramilitaries communicated with others via radio.

A troop of army soldiers arrived at the Humanitarian Zone around 5pm that same day. Members of the community have asked the soldiers to remain on the perimeter of the Humanitarian Zone. Although soldiers are currently present just outside the Humanitarian Zone, the community have said that the army will leave the Zone's perimeter on 13 February. Community members claim this is the first time that army troops have been present in the area since reports first emerged almost two weeks ago about a paramilitary presence in the Cacarica region.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the members of the Humanitarian Zone of Nueva Esperanza en Dios, other Afro-descendant communities of the Cacarica river basin, including their leaders, and members of the NGO Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, given the incursion of a large number of paramilitaries into the area;
- Urging the authorities to implement protection measures in strict accordance with the wishes of those threatened, and order full and impartial investigations into the threats and the presence of paramilitaries;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with certain sectors of the security forces, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 MARCH 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**

Defence Minister

Señor Luis Carlos Villegas
 Ministerio de Defensa
 Carrera 54, no.26-29
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 266 1003

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

And copies to:

Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz
 Carrera 37A No 25B-42
 Bogotá D.C., Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 268 7179

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

In 1997 as part of “Operation Génesis”, a military operation coordinated by the XVII Brigade, paramilitaries forcibly displaced over 3,000 members of the Afro-descendant communities of the Cacarica river basin. The majority of the displaced communities began a process of return to the Cacarica river basin in the early 2000s.

To guarantee their safety given on-going death threats and human rights violations community members were facing at the hands of the security forces and paramilitaries, community members created two Humanitarian Zones: Nueva Esperanza en Dios and Nueva Vida, and insisted on their rights as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict. Since their return, the Afro-descendant communities have continued to face constant threats and other human rights violations.

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 Cacarica 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, which is currently in the process of demobilizing and disarming after it reached a peace agreement with the government at the end of 2016.

UA: 43/17 Index: AMR 23/5685/2017 Issue Date: 13 February 2017