

URGENT ACTION

PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY THREATENS PEACE COMMUNITY

Over the last few months, there has been an increase in paramilitary activity in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó in north-western Colombia. This has placed members of the community and other local inhabitants at serious risk.

Over the last few months, scores of paramilitaries, some in military fatigues and identifying themselves as members of the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC), have been intermittently camped in various parts of the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó**. Community members report that the paramilitaries have threatened them and told them they are in the area to stay. They also state that security forces have been present in the area and have told members of the community that they are aware of the paramilitary presence, but that they would not take action since the community would only try to distort anything the security forces did.

On 11 October members of the Peace Community, accompanied by international observers, travelled to the hamlet of Arenas Bajas to rescue families belonging to the community who had been trapped in their homes since paramilitaries arrived in the area on 8 October. The paramilitaries were asked to leave but they refused, arguing that their main aim was to remain in this area. Families reported that the paramilitaries had also destroyed some of their crops.

On 3 October a group of paramilitaries camped in the home of a leader of the Peace Community, Rubí Arteaga, in the hamlet of Mulato Medio. Neither Rubí Arteaga nor her family were at home at the time. According to witnesses, this same group of paramilitaries had been in the nearby hamlet of La Hoz on 24 September. The paramilitaries had entered various homes in the hamlet and beat up three peasant farmers. They told the farmers they had orders to kill anyone they wanted. They also said they were looking for several people, three of whom are members of the Peace Community, and that they would kill three to four members of the Community to show who was in charge.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of the members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and other civilians living in the area;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with stated government commitments;
- Reminding them that civilians, including the San José de Apartadó Peace Community and other civilians living in the area, have the right to not be drawn into the armed conflict.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 NOVEMBER 2016 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:

Peace Community
 Comunidad de Paz de
 San José de Apartadó
 AA 243 de Apartadó
 Antioquia, Colombia

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

The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó is made up of people living in a number of hamlets in the municipality of Apartadó, in Antioquia Department, north-western Colombia, who maintain their right to not be drawn into Colombia's armed conflict and refuse to take sides with any of the parties to the conflict. They refuse to bear arms or provide information or logistical support to either side. In return, the members of the Peace Community demand that the parties to the conflict stay out of their communities and respect their decision not to participate in or to collaborate with the warring parties.

Since the Peace Community was established on 23 March 1997, more than 200 of its members have been killed or subjected to enforced disappearance, while others have been threatened or sexually assaulted. Those in the Peace Community are in constant danger. The majority of those killed lost their lives at the hands of paramilitaries, who have often operated with the support and acquiescence of members of the armed forces in the area. Guerrilla forces have also killed members of the Peace Community. Over the last decade many civilians who are not members of the Peace Community, but have links to them or live in the area, have also been killed.

Despite their supposed demobilization a decade ago, paramilitaries continue to operate in various parts of the country. According to the latest report on the human rights situation in Colombia, published in March 2016, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said that paramilitary groups (referred to as “post-demobilization groups” in the report) “constantly undermine human rights and citizen security, the administration of justice and peacebuilding, including land restitution. Dismantling the groups that control stolen land through the use or threat of violence represents a permanent challenge to peace”.

UA: 236/16 Index: AMR 23/4998/2016 Issue Date: 17 October 2016