

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## MEDIA BRIEFING

**Embargo: 28 October 2008 10:00 GMT**

### **Colombia: 'Leave us in peace!' Targeting civilians in the internal armed conflict Case Studies**

#### **Killings of civilians**

At around 8am on 24 March 2008, 22-year-old campesino Eiber Isidro Mendoza and his wife, Astrid Sanabria, set off from the hamlet of Monterralo in Aguazul Municipality, Casanare Department, to walk to the village of Los Lirios in the same municipality. After walking for about 1km, Astrid Sanabria stopped to wash her hands in a pool of water while her husband continued on his way. When Astrid Sanabria resumed her journey she was stopped at a roadblock controlled by the XVI Brigade of the army. She asked them to let her through since she wanted to catch up with her husband, but they told her they had not seen anyone pass. They refused to let her pass, but she stayed at the roadblock until 1.30pm, after which she returned to Monterralo and then to Cupiagua. At 3.30pm, members of the Technical Investigative Unit (Cuerpo Técnico de Investigaciones, CTI) of the Office of the Attorney General contacted Astrid Sanabria's sister and informed her that Eiber Isidro Mendoza has been killed by the army in Monterralo and that she should go to the offices of the army's anti-kidnapping unit (Grupo de Acción Unificada de Libertad Personal, GAULA), in Yopal, the capital of Casanare Department, to claim the body. The army claimed that Eiber Isidro Méndoza had been a guerrilla killed in combat.

On 18 February 2008 around 20 armed and uniformed men belonging to a paramilitary group calling itself Black Eagles Central Bloc (Bloque Central Águilas Negras, BCAN) set up a temporary roadblock on the San Pablo-Santa Rosa highway in Bolívar Department. They reportedly stopped a vehicle belonging to the South of Bolívar Association of Cocoa Producers (Asociación de Productores de Cacao del Sur de Bolívar, Aprocasur). They forced Miguel Daza, a co-ordinator of Aprocasur, and Jhon Martínez, his driver, from the vehicle and shot them dead. Shortly after, the paramilitaries stopped Wilmar Tabarez, who was travelling on his motorcycle, and also shot him dead. Witnesses have claimed that during the one hour the roadblock was in operation, army soldiers were present 500m away. Eyewitnesses have also said that these same paramilitaries, who they say are officially demobilized, patrol the urban centre of San Pablo in a taxi despite the heavy presence of the security forces in the area.

On 2 October 2007, members of the FARC are alleged to have killed three employees of the electricity company Ingeolétrica, and abducted two other workers in the municipality of Sonsón, Antioquia Department. All five men were carrying out work for the company Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM). The two men abducted were released the next day. According to information received, the FARC had prohibited EPM from carrying out work in municipalities of the Eastern Antioquia (Oriente Antioqueño) region of Antioquia Department.

#### **Enforced disappearances**

On 26 May 2008, members of the paramilitary group, the Peasant Self-Defence Forces of Nariño (Autodefensas Campesinas de Nariño, ACN) shot and killed Willinton Riascos in the hamlet of Bocas del Canal, in Olaya Herrera Municipality, Nariño Department, after he failed to obey their order of "Nobody run, all to the floor" when they entered the village. They then started to hit his companion, a man known as "El Pipe", with the butts of their guns. The paramilitaries took "El Pipe" away by boat, in the direction of a paramilitary encampment located a five-minute journey from a permanent military post operated by the 70th Marine Infantry. At the time of writing there had been no further news of the whereabouts of "El Pipe".

#### **Landmines**

On 27 June 2008, three Indigenous children from the Las Planadas Telembi reservation in the municipality of Samaniego, Nariño Department, were walking along the banks of the

River Telembi when they stepped on landmines placed by a guerrilla group. Fifteen-year-old Dumar Alexander Paí Nastacuas, 12-year-old Leibar Paí Nastacuas, and eight-year-old José Edilmer Paí Nastacuas were killed instantly. Guerrilla groups continue to use anti-personnel mines, many of whose victims are civilians. Colombia has the highest number of landmine victims in the world.

#### **Violence against women**

16-year-old Ingrid Yahaira Sinisterra was abducted and killed by paramilitaries on 24 August 2007, in Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department. Her family went to see the paramilitaries to ask for her body. They told Ingrid's family that they had killed her as a warning to others not to have relationships with guerrillas. They said her body had been tied to an electricity post all night and the family should return the next day to reclaim the body. When her family went back the following day, they were told Ingrid's body had been thrown into the sea after her belly had been cut open and her internal organs removed. The family recovered Ingrid's body - which had multiple stab wounds - from the sea that same day and buried her on 27 August.

#### **Children**

In December 2007, two men in civilian clothes approached 12-year-old Felipe and some other boys in a street at the entrance to his neighbourhood in Valle del Cauca Department. They told the boys that in the next few days the guerrilla militia which operates in his neighbourhood would bomb the area and that their families would be killed. They asked the boys whether they preferred to die in the bombing or would instead warn the authorities. The boys agreed to inform the army and police about any strange goings-on. A few days later the men gave the boys mobile phones so that they could warn the authorities. Felipe met up with the men on several occasions and even visited the police headquarters to verify the identity of a recently captured person. He was rewarded with 20,000 pesos (around US\$10). In February 2008, while Felipe was in the street, he received a call from one of the men asking him about the "bandits". He did not reply since the street was full of people. A member of the guerrilla militia observing Felipe grabbed the phone, smashed it and threatened to kill Felipe. However, another member of the militia intervened and told Felipe to leave the neighbourhood, which he did. "I only helped them so that I could get a mobile phone, and the money is useful", Felipe said.

#### **Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities**

On 7 November 2007, the FARC kidnapped Bonifacia Caicedo Valoyes from the Afro-descendant community of Tanguí, on the banks of the River Atrato, Chocó Department. This followed the kidnapping by the FARC of two leaders from the same community in August 2007; the two were released after a few days. These kidnappings led to the mass displacement to the city of Quibdó on 11 November of 674 people from Tanguí and 82 people from the neighbouring Afro-descendant community of Paina, including 300 children.

On 22 March 2008, armed men, thought to be paramilitaries, reportedly entered the Awá reservation of La Vega Changüí Chimuza, Ricaurte Municipality, Nariño Department, looking for Alonso Rosero Moreno, John Sotelo Rosero and Paulino Fajardo Marín, whose names were on a list the armed men were carrying. The three men were taken away and their bodies were subsequently found. They had been shot dead.

#### **Human rights defenders and trade unionists**

On 17 April 2008, the body of Jesús Heberto Caballero Ariza, a leader of the Union of SENA Public Sector Employees (Sindicato de Empleados Públicos del SENA, SINDESENA) was found in Sabanalarga Municipality, Atlántico Department. His body bore signs of torture. He had been shot, and attacked with a machete-like weapon. His skull was fractured while his face had multiple wounds. Prior to his death, he had received death threats made by the Black Eagles paramilitary group. His death occurred a few days before a death threat signed by the Black Eagles, dated 21 April 2008, was circulated in Atlántico Department by email to trade union and human rights organizations. Jesús Heberto Caballero was reported to have been exposing corrupt practices within the SENA, the National Apprenticeship Service (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje).