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OFFICE IN COLOMBIA

OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

There is an urgent need to clarify the massacres at San José de Apartadó and provide security for the peace community

March 22, 2005

The Office in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in fulfillment of its mandate, makes the following observations regarding the tragic events recently suffered by the peace community of San José de Apartadó:

1. Serious and grave crimes have been committed against members of the peace community of San José de Apartadó for nearly a decade. Most of these crimes have yet to be clarified. The government and the relevant authorities need to take appropriate measures so that impunity for these acts does not continue.
2. An integral presence by state authorities is needed throughout the Colombian territory to guarantee and protect the fundamental rights of all inhabitants.
3. Investigation of the crimes committed in the area of the peace community of San José de Apartadó, as appropriate in a democratic state, is the responsibility of the Attorney General's Office.
4. The Office trusts that the Attorney General, with support from the Procurator General, will be able to promptly clarify the tragic deaths of eight civilians, including four children, which occurred last February 21st.
5. The Office also trusts that the members of the community of peace of San José de Apartadó will collaborate with the judicial authorities in charge of the process and that the latter will guarantee the security and tranquility of witnesses and family members of the victims.
6. Until there is a court decision assigning responsibility for the crimes, it is advisable to abstain from making statements that could endanger the lives or physical integrity of the members of the community or that could lead to their forced displacement. The Office suggests that prudence be exercised in handling public information relating to the community of peace of San José de Apartadó.

7. The Colombian state has the responsibility to implement all necessary measures to protect, individually and as a whole, the members of the community of peace of San José de Apartadó, in accordance with requests by the Inter-American Court for Human Rights and the Colombian Constitutional court. The Office trusts that the lives and integrity of the members of that community will be protected and guaranteed through appropriate state measures respectful of and agreed upon with the community.