

COLOMBIA

First army officer sentenced in Peace Community massacre

Since 2002, RRN has faxed at least 16 letters to Colombian government officials regarding intimidation, harassment, threats and assassinations of residents of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, a small village in the Urabá region, that **declared itself a “Peace Community” in March 1997, insisting that ALL armed actors—guerrillas, army and paramilitaries—stay out of their villages.** Located approximately 12 km from the city of Apartadó, Antioquia Department, San José de Apartadó is comprised of 28 hamlets and has a population of nearly 3,000. Their land is apt for raising cattle and for cultivating corn, cocoa, avocado, yucca, plantains, rice and coffee.

Despite their insistence that they are opposed to all armed violence from all sides, officials in the Colombian government—including President Alvaro Uribe himself—have accused Peace Community leaders of being aligned with the FARC guerrillas.

The community has suffered countless massacres, including one in February 2005 that left eight people, including two children, dismembered in two separate graves. These killings took place during military operations by the XVII Brigade in the area and coincided with the planned return of several families to the abandoned hamlet of La Esperanza the following month. A previous attempt to repopulate La Esperanza coincided with the killing by paramilitaries of several inhabitants of the Peace Community in April 1999.

Good news: March 2010

Twenty months after Capitan Guillermo Gordillo pled guilty in the February 2005 massacre of eight people in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, a judge sentenced him to 20 years in prison. **This is the first ruling against an army officer for the massacre.**

Unfortunately, despite copious evidence linking higher ranking army officers, particularly Generals Mario Montoya and Héctor Fandiño, to the planning (Montoya) and the execution and cover-up (Fandiño, head of the Army's 17th Brigade), acting Colombian Attorney General Guillermo Mendoza seems determined not to advance investigations of their involvement.