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ACTION WHA-01

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-01	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-01	A-00	CA-02
	CCO-00	CTME-00	INL-01	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	ED-01
	FBIE-00	FBO-01	HHS-01	H-01	SSA-01	TEDE-00	INR-00
	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	MMP-00	M-00	AC-01	NSAE-00
	OCS-03	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	OPR-01	PA-00	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00
	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	USSS-00	ASDS-01
	DTC-01	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-01	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00
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P 242300Z FEB 00  
 FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3499  
 INFO NSC WASHDC  
 SECDEF WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 001594

DEPT PASS TO USAID

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/10  
 TAGS: PHUM, PTER, MASS, PREF, AORC, ASEC, SOCI, CO  
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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 01594 01 OF 02 242301Z  
 SUBJECT: THREE PARAMILITARY MASSACRES ON COLOMBIA'S NORTH COAST

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR CURTIS W. KAMMAN, REASON 1.5(D).

SUMMARY  
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1. (C) THREE PARAMILITARY MASSACRES IN NORTHERN COLOMBIA -- INCLUDING THE LARGEST IN RECENT MEMORY -- HAVE PROVOKED THE FLIGHT OF THOUSANDS OF PEASANTS FROM THE AREA. THE MILITARY PURSUED THE PARAMILITARY ATTACKERS, WITH SOME NOTABLE SUCCESSES. THE ATTACKS OCCURRED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LONG-RUNNING GUERRILLA-PARAMILITARY COMPETITION

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DEPT OF STATE APPEALS REVIEW PANEL (ARP)

FOIA/PA	Mandate
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( ) Deny	( ) Class. Restriction

Exemptions \_\_\_\_\_  
 ARP Action Cert. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

FOR THE STRATEGIC MONTES DE MARIA COASTAL REGION. VICTIMS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SELECTIVELY TARGETED IN TWO OF THE MASSACRES. HOWEVER, THE LARGEST MASSACRE WAS AN INDISCRIMINATE ORGY OF DRUNKEN VIOLENCE. END SUMMARY.

FIRST OF THREE MASSACRES AT LAS OVEJAS, SUCRE

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2. (U) A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 150 AUC PARAMILITARIES STAGED ATTACKS IN FIVE NEIGHBORHOODS OF LAS OVEJAS MUNICIPALITY OF SUCRE DEPARTMENT FEBRUARY 16-17. THEY MURDERED AT LEAST 20 PERSONS WHOM THEY SUSPECTED OF BEING SYMPATHIZERS OR MEMBERS OF GUERRILLA MOVEMENTS, AND BURNED DOZENS OF HOMES. (THE HUMAN RIGHTS UNIT OF THE FISCALIA (FUDH) REPORTED THAT IT PROCESSED DEATH CERTIFICATES FOR 18 RESIDENTS OF LAS OVEJAS AS OF FEBRUARY 24, BUT THAT THE WORK WAS INCOMPLETE.) LAS OVEJAS IS IN THE MONTES DE MARIA REGION, A STRATEGIC AREA LONG CONTESTED BY PARAMILITARIES AND FARC AND ELN GUERRILLAS FOR ITS VALUE

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AS A DRUGS- AND GUNS-RUNNING CORRIDOR. ACCORDING TO PRESS, MORE THAN 20 COMBATANTS WERE KILLED IN CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN AREA PARAMILITARIES AND GUERRILLAS. THE AIR FORCE FORCED DOWN IN THE AREA ONE OF AN ESTIMATED NINE HELICOPTERS BELONGING TO CARLOS CASTANO'S AUC. THE PARAMILITARY PILOTS DESTROYED THE HELICOPTER AFTER IT WAS FORCED TO LAND. (NOTE: THE HELICOPTER REPORTEDLY HAD ONE .50 CALIBER MACHINE GUN MOUNTED IN THE DOORWAY. END NOTE.)

37 KILLED INDISCRIMINATELY AT EL SALADO

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3. (U) USING A RANCH FORMERLY OWNED BY (NOW-JAILED) NARCOTICS TRAFFICKER MICKEY RAMIREZ IN ZAMBRANO, BOLIVAR DEPARTMENT, AS THEIR STAGING AREA, PARAMILITARIES ATTACKED EL SALADO, BOLIVAR FEBRUARY 19-20. THE PARAS REPORTEDLY HAD BEEN PRESENT IN THE TOWN SINCE FEBRUARY 16. (NOTE: EL SALADO IS JUST A FEW MILES OVER THE DEPARTMENTAL BORDER FROM LAS OVEJAS, SUCRE. END NOTE.) ACCORDING TO PABLO ELIAS GONZALEZ, DIRECTOR OF THE FISCALIA'S (PROSECUTOR GENERAL) TECHNICAL CORPS OF INVESTIGATORS (CTI) AND NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN JOSE FERNANDO CASTRO, THE PARAMILITARIES MURDERED 37 PEOPLE IN AN INDISCRIMINATE, AND DRUNKEN, ORGY OF VIOLENCE. AS OF FEBRUARY 24, THE CTI HAD EXHUMED AND PROCESSED DEATH CERTIFICATES FOR 24 PERSONS, BUT THE UNIT DIRECTOR ASSURED HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER THERE WERE MORE TO FOLLOW. MOST VICTIMS WERE

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PULLED FROM THEIR HOMES, ALTHOUGH AT LEAST ONE VICTIM HAD HIS THROAT SLIT IN A CHURCH. AN UNDETERMINED NUMBER OF HOMES WERE BURNED.

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MARINES GIVE CHASE

4. (U) MARINES OF THE THIRD MARINE INFANTRY BATTALION, ULTIMATELY UNDER THE COMMAND OF COLONEL RODRIGO QUINONES, PURSUED THE ATTACKING PARAMILITARIES. ON FEBRUARY 22, QUINONES REPORTED THAT HIS MEN HAD KILLED TWO PARAS AND CAPTURED ANOTHER 11. THE FUDH REPORTED THAT QUINONES HAD TURNED THE 11 OVER FOR JUDICIAL PROCESSING. NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN CASTRO TOLD HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER FEBRUARY 23 THAT HE WAS SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED BY THE MARINES' QUICK RESPONSE.

PEASANTS FLEE VIOLENCE

5. (U) IN RESPONSE TO THE MASSACRES AT LAS OVEJAS-EL SALADO, AREA PEASANTS PACKED THEIR BELONGINGS ON TO CARTS AND FLED. NGO'S AND PRESS ESTIMATED THEIR NUMBERS AT APPROXIMATELY 3,000.

MASSACRE AT PEACE COMMUNITY

6. (C) ON THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 19, ACCU PARAMILITARIES SELECTIVELY ASSASSINATED FIVE BANANA WORKERS IN THE SELF-DECLARED "PEACE COMMUNITY" OF SAN JOSE DE APARTADO, IN URABA, ANTIOQUIA DEPARTMENT, AND WOUNDED A FURTHER THREE. THE ACCU REPORTEDLY SUSPECTED THE MEN OF BEING

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	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	USSS-00	ASDS-01

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DTC-01 PMB-00 DSCC-00 PRM-01 DRL-02 G-00 NFAT-00  
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P 242300Z FEB 00  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3500  
INFO NSC WASHDC  
SECDEF WASHDC  
AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
CIA WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BOGOTA 001594

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SUBJECT: THREE PARAMILITARY MASSACRES ON COLOMBIA'S NORTH  
COAST

SYMPATHIZERS OR MEMBERS OF GUERRILLA MOVEMENTS. ARMY  
BRIGADIER GENERAL CARLOS VARGAS FORERO, COMMANDER OF THE  
17TH BRIGADE, TOLD PRESS HE WAS WORKING WITH POLICE TO  
ATTEMPT TO APPREHEND THE PERPETRATORS. HARD-LEFT HUMAN  
RIGHTS NGO JUSTICE AND PEACE ("JUSTICIA Y PAZ"), WHICH  
MAINTAINS AN OFFICE IN APARTADO, PUBLICLY CHARGED THAT  
SOME MEMBERS OF THE 17TH BRIGADE HAD PARTICIPATED DIRECTLY  
IN THE MASSACRE.

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7. (C) (NOTE ON SAN JOSE DE APARTADO: THIS "PEACE  
COMMUNITY" -- LOCATED IN EXTREMELY CONFLICTIVE URABA  
REGION -- DECLARED ITSELF NEUTRAL IN COLOMBIA'S INTERNAL  
CONFLICT IN MARCH 1997, AND PROHIBITED THE PRESENCE OF THE  
STATE'S ARMED FORCES WITHIN ITS TERRITORY.

AND IN 1998,  
THE GOVERNMENT OF FRANCE PRESENTED THE COMMUNITY WITH A  
PRESTIGIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD. NATIONAL AND  
INTERNATIONAL NGO'S MAINTAIN A SIZEABLE PRESENCE IN  
APARTADO.

IN SPITE OF APARTADO'S STATED  
COMMITMENT TO NON-VIOLENCE, SOME SECTORS OF THE ARMED

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8. (C) WHAT'S NEW ABOUT ALL THIS? IN ONE SENSE, NOT MUCH: PARAMILITARIES AND GUERRILLAS HAVE FOUGHT OVER THE STRATEGIC MONTES DE MARIA REGION FOR YEARS. HOWEVER, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME POST CAN RECALL THAT THE MILITARY, IN THIS CASE MARINES, PURSUED PARAMILITARIES IN THE WAKE OF ATROCITIES IN THE REGION WITH SOME VIGOR. THE MILITARY'S MOTIVES FOR GOING AFTER THE PARAS WITH NEWFOUND ALACRITY ARE OPEN TO DEBATE.

9. (C) THESE CASES ALSO DESERVE ATTENTION FOR THE SHEER NUMBERS OF PERSONS MASSACRED. WITH 37 REPORTED DEAD AT EL SALADO, THIS LOOKS TO HAVE BEEN THE WORST SINGLE MASSACRE SINCE THE 1988 SEGOVIA MASSACRE. (THE 1997 MAPIRIPAN MASSACRE MAY HAVE CLAIMED MORE VICTIMS, BUT THERE WAS NEVER A DEFINITIVE BODY COUNT.) THE GOVERNOR OF BOLIVAR DEPARTMENT SAID HE WAS GOING TO LOOK INTO THE BACKGROUNDS OF THOSE MURDERED, WITH THE GOAL OF DETERMINING WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE IN LEAGUE WITH GUERRILLAS, AS THE PARAMILITARIES CLAIM.

RECENTLY TOLD PRM A/S TAFT THAT PARAMILITARIES' TARGETING OF GUERRILLAS IS BECOMING MORE ACCURATE. INDEED, THEIR TARGETING WAS QUITE SELECTIVE AT LAS OVEJAS AND SAN JOSE DE APARTADO. HOWEVER, JUDGING BY THE PARAMILITARIES' DRUNKEN, WILD BEHAVIOR, THE MASSACRE AT EL SALADO LOOKS TO HAVE BEEN VERY INDISCRIMINATE.

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