

DRL PRESS GUIDANCE

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COLOMBIA: FEBRUARY MASSACRE AT EL SALADO

Q: Any comment on the New York Times article on the February massacre at El Salado, Colombia?

A:

- We strongly condemn the horrific and barbaric paramilitary massacre that took place in El Salado, in February.
- The internal armed conflict is the single greatest cause of human rights violations in Colombia. The peace process initiated by President Pastrana offers the greatest hope for ameliorating the situation.
- We call on all actors in the conflict to respect human rights and international humanitarian law.
- All combatants should immediately stop all kidnapping and murders of civilians, end the practice of recruiting child soldiers, and avoid situations where the lives of innocent civilians are put at risk.

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Q: What about allegations that Colombian security forces failed to prevent the massacre?

A:

- We understand that Colombian Marine forces pursued the paramilitaries after the massacre and killed 2 and captured 11 paramilitaries.
- The incident remains under investigation by Colombian authorities. We reserve further comment further pending the outcome of that investigation.

Q: Are Colombian security forces collaborating with paramilitaries?

A:

- President Pastrana and Armed Forces Commander Tapias have repeatedly enunciated a "zero tolerance" policy concerning collaboration by security forces with paramilitaries.
- President Pastrana has removed from service four generals for links with paramilitaries or for failing to confront them aggressively.
- We continue to urge the Government of Colombia to ensure that all such links be severed.

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- The Pastrana administration has taken significant steps to improve Colombia's human rights performance, including passage of a military penal reform bill and a law against forced disappearance.
- We strongly support these efforts, and our assistance package contains numerous programs to promote and protect human rights.

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Context: The New York Times reported today on a particularly egregious massacre that took place in February in El Salado (Bolívar), in northern Colombia. The article alleges that the police and armed forces failed to come to the aid of the villagers. The article raises again the issue of alleged ties between Colombian security forces and paramilitary groups.

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