

# Peace Brigades International Colombia Project

## Public Statement

London, February 28th, 2005

Everyone involved in Peace Brigades International Colombia would like to express their deep concern and sadness at the murder of Luis Eduardo Guerra, well-known leader of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community in Antioquia, Colombia, and seven other people, among them women and children. This shocking massacre took place between the 21st and 22nd of February.



*Luis Eduardo Guerra, August 2004.  
Photo: PBI Colombia.*

PBI accompanied Luis Eduardo from the time we established our team in Urabá in 1998. He was one of the community leaders we most admired for the clarity and consistency of his ideas and his total commitment to peace and human rights despite systematic death threats against him. These threats forced Luis Eduardo to leave San José de Apartadó, but after being internally displaced for more than two years he returned in 2004. PBI accompanied him in the sadness of his departure and in the joy of his return.

Luis Eduardo Guerra represented the peace community in numerous meetings with the Colombian government and state agencies, the diplomatic corps accredited in Colombia, and national and international organisations. He met politicians, journalists and solidarity committees during his tours in countries such as Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United States.

According to statements from the San José de Apartadó Peace Community and the Corporation for Judicial Liberty (both accompanied by Peace Brigades International) eyewitnesses confirm that on February 21, near the Mulatos river, Luis Eduardo Guerra, his son, his partner and another person were detained by armed men in uniform who identified themselves as belonging to the 11th Army Brigade. They were then taken to the farm of Alfonso Bolívar Tuberquia, a member of the Peace Council of the hamlet of Mulatos.

Luis Eduardo Guerra, Alfonso Bolívar and their families were not seen again. Several local people went back the next day to Alfonso Bolívar Tuberquia's farm and discovered traces of blood and human remains. When the Internal Council of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community received this information, it immediately requested that the relevant state agencies investigate these occurrences.

On February 25, the Peace Community organised a fact-finding commission and invited state agencies and national and international NGOs to take part. This commission, which included about 100 members of the community, walked from San José to the hamlets of Mulatos and La Resbalosa accompanied by the Corporation for Judicial Liberty, Peace Brigades International, Fellowship Of Reconciliation and Concern America. At the same time, officials from the Attorney General's office and the Internal Affairs Agency arrived in the area by helicopter.

The judicial commission carried out the exhumation of a grave on the farm of Alfonso Bolívar Tuberquia where the mutilated bodies of three adults were found in addition to the bodies of two children aged six and two. Later in the day, near the hamlet of La Resbalosa, three more bodies were found (two adults and a boy of eleven). Members of the community recognised them as those of Luis Eduardo Guerra and his family. The body of Luis Eduardo Guerra bore signs of torture. In both instances members of Peace Brigades International were present.

This massacre joins the list of constant attacks the San José de Apartadó Peace Community has faced since it was founded in 1997, resulting in more than 130 murders for which as yet no one has been convicted.

It is disturbing that a community of such international renown, the recipient of provisional protection from the Interamerican Court of Human Rights, and for which the Colombian Constitutional Court also requested effective protective measures in March 2004, should endure an attack of such cruelty and the loss of one of its historic leaders.

Once again, Peace Brigades International urges protection for the people of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community and the Colombian organisations that support the community. Furthermore, in order to prevent any future attacks we ask that a thorough and exhaustive investigation be carried out in which the facts are established and appropriate steps taken.

Peace Brigades International is bringing out this public statement, which deviates from our usual procedures, because of the seriousness of what has taken place. We reiterate our commitment to the project of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community and accompany them in their grief. We will endeavour to cherish the memory of those whom we have lost as a way of overcoming the profound sadness we all feel at this time.

**Peace Brigades International - Colombia**