Urgent Update on Indigenous Human Rights Abuses: Colombia

The following report, dated August 29, 2002, is from Betsy Marsh of Amazon Alliance:

The Organizacion Zonal Indigena de Putumayo (OZIP) reports that some 6 indigenous communities, Inga, Cofan, Paez, Embera and Awa, were sprayed heavily about 10 to 11 days ago, despite the fact that they had little if any coca crops present. The sprayings are continuing now. At least two of these communities had already eradicated their coca crops manually. The situation is severe because it wiped out most of their food crops. The communities are apparently surrounded by campesino farms where coca is still cultivated.

OZIP, the indigenous governors of these communities, and the three NGOs that have been involved with the manual eradication process, are working together now to document the damage. On Sept. 3 they will have a meeting to discuss the results and prepare a report to denounce the situation. OZIP is also working to get a meeting with the Defensor del Pueblo in Bogota.

The Latin American Human Rights Association (ALDHU) also told me that they have received reports that 5 people have died from the spraying, near the border with Ecuador. ALDHU is meeting with the Ecuadorian Armed Forces tomorrow to get more details.

Also, ALDHU has a Audiencia Publica with the Colombian Defensor del Pueblo for Sept. 25 to discuss the fumigations and threats to and assassinations of indigenous leaders. They would be very glad if any of the US groups who have representatives in Bogota could attend. Please let me know if it would be possible for any representatives to join them at this meeting.

Finally, some 1500-2000 Cofans are fleeing their territory because of the recent violence and assassinations. They are looking for humanitarian aid.