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### **Details of the testimony that links Uribe to massacre**

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In testimony presented last February before the Office of the Attorney General of Colombia, the ex paramilitary member Francisco Enrique Villalba Hernández claimed that Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and his brother, Santiago, participated in the planning of a massacre which took place in the northern part of the region of Antioquia, according to a copy of the testimony obtained by *El Nuevo Herald*.

Portions of the testimony presented by Villalba, whose credibility President Uribe attacked this week, were cited by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in a ruling two years ago that condemned Colombia for the 1997 massacre in the township of El Aro.

Villalba's statements before the IACHR do not make mention of the President nor his brother. However, his testimony formed part of the evidence considered by the court in its 160-page ruling which found that Colombian security forces collaborated with members of the paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) in the massacre that killed at least 15 El Aro residents.

The IACHR decision also cites testimony claiming that President Uribe, then governor of Antioquia, refused to protect the residents of El Aro after learning that a paramilitary attack was imminent.

“Two months before the massacre, the El Aro Community Action Committee asked for protection from the governorship [of Antioquia], and their request was denied” stated the decision of the IACHR.

Up until now, the public had only heard some fragments of Villalba's testimony, revealed unexpectedly by Uribe in an interview given to a Colombian radio station this week in which he denied the allegations.

But *El Nuevo Herald* obtained a complete copy of the testimony that, in effect, contains numerous statements by Villalba in which he claims that Uribe, while governor of Antioquia, met with leaders of the AUC and gave them carte blanche to carry out the massacre.

“[Alvaro Uribe told us] that we should do what we had to do,” said Villalba, upon describing a meeting in which leaders of the AUC, members of the Colombian military, and Alvaro and Santiago Uribe participated.

Villalba's 19-page testimony, containing many details, including names, describes the close relationship, one of complicity and camaraderie, which existed between military authorities and the police, on the one hand, with the leaders of the death squads.

Villalba denounced the murders of officials from the public prosecutor's office involved in the investigation of the massacre and of human rights activists that had collaborated with the authorities in the investigation, as well as three attacks, one of them involving cyanide placed in a malt beverage.

The testimony contains at least two inconsistencies: one of the Colombian military officers who Villalba says attended a meeting in late 1997 had died in April of that same year, and the massacre did not take place in November, as asserted by Villalba, but rather in October.

According to statements given by Villalba to the Medellin-based daily *El Colombiano*, when the paramilitaries arrived in El Aro, a mountain village of approximately 500 residents located in the northern region of Antioquia, they came bearing a list of targets.

Some were killed, face-down, with a shot to the back of the head, in the town's main square. They also killed a 14-year old. However, in the case of Marco Aurelio Areiza Osorio, the 64-year old owner of grocery store, well-regarded in the area for his generosity, the paramilitaries were exceptionally ruthless.

According to testimony obtained by Human Rights Watch and Colombian journalists, the paramilitaries ordered Osorio to prepare a stew. Upon serving it, Osorio was tied to an orange-tree and, while still alive, the paramilitaries removed his heart, followed by his eyes and his testicles.

Some children, who managed to hide near the square, witnessed everything.

"He groaned like an animal and then shouted like a child," one of the children told Carlos Giraldo and Miguel Garrido, journalists from *El Colombiano*.

The paramilitaries entered El Aro on Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, one day before the municipal elections. They took the town for four days, during which time 120 paramilitary members dressed in AUC uniforms assassinated farmers, raped women, looted business, and stole about 900 heads of cattle, according to official records.

Villalba, who is 36 years old, confessed to having participated in this massacre, as well as in others committed by the AUC.

Three months following the events at El Aro, Villalba surrendered himself to authorities because, according to him, he was tired of so much killing and because attacks had been planned about which he was not in agreement. He is currently serving a prison sentence of 33 years in La Picota penitentiary, located in Bogotá.

According to statements given by Villalba to the police, the Colombian Army and the AUC planned the taking of El Aro in order to teach a lesson to the guerrillas of the Fuerzas Armadas

Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) as well as to rescue eight cattle ranchers and merchants that had been kidnapped.

Villalba testified that three days before the massacre, a meeting was held on the ranch of a farmer –whom he did not identify - in the municipality of La Caucana, in the northeast zone of Antioquia. According to Villalba, present at the meeting were leaders from the AUC, commanders of the army's IV Brigade, police officials and the Uribe brothers.

“Present as well were Santiago Uribe and Alvaro Uribe, who at the time was the governor,” he said.

Asked whether he had met the Uribe brothers prior to the meeting, Villalba answered that while he had not met Alvaro, Santiago “was always known within the organization because to this day he has a paramilitary unit in Santa Rosa de Osos.”

Villalba confirmed that he discovered who Alvaro Uribe was after the massacre, when the then governor came to the very same ranch where the meeting had been held to congratulate the paramilitaries on the success of their operation.

“I knew that it was Alvaro Uribe because he introduced himself, he spoke with us, and he said that the operation had been a success, that the hostages had escaped unharmed,” said Villalba. “Uribe arrived with a bodyguard whose last name was Serna,” he added.

The eight hostages were freed.

This week, Uribe denied ever having been present at La Caucana.

In his testimony before the public prosecutor, Villalba stated that he saw Uribe’s bodyguard years later, when Serna was working as a guard at the National Penitentiary Institute (INPEC), in La Picota prison, in Bogotá. Serna recognized him and greeted him, added Villalba.

Also present at the meeting which took place prior to the massacre were the AUC leaders Carlos Castaño, who at the time was the head of the organization but was later assassinated, Salvatore Mancuso, second in command, and others whom Villalba identified by the aliases “Noventa”, “Cobra”, “el Negro Ricardo”, and “Junior.”

Villalba added that also present was a man whom he identified, hesitating, as José Ardila and who was a member of “los Convivir”, the rural self-defense organizations which had been legalized by the Colombian government.

Asked about the whereabouts of Ardila, Villalba said: “[Ardila] was testifying against Alvaro Uribe, they took him out of prison, he was sentenced to 60 years, and they disappeared him, I don’t know where he is.”

Mancuso was sentenced by a Colombian court to 40 years in prison for the massacres committed at El Aro and La Granja, the latter of which involved the torture and murder of five people on July 11, 1996.

According to Villalba, Alvaro Uribe “was invited by Carlos Castaño” to the meeting preceding the massacre and later introduced by Mancuso to those in attendance.

Uribe spoke publicly during this meeting, added Villalba.

“Alvaro Uribe gave recommendations, he suggested that the hostages, that everyone should escape unharmed and that we should do whatever we had to do,” said Villalba.

Asked about the ranch where the meetings took place, the ex paramilitary said “to the left there are some farm-yards and a stable, the ranch did not have a name but it still exists, we arrived one day before [the meeting], with 22 men.”

Villalba testified before Carlos A. Camargo Hernández, a prosecutor with the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law division of the public prosecutor’s office, that the meeting “took place during the day, started around ten in the morning, and ended [at] three in the afternoon, after lunch.”

According to Villalba, Mancuso and Castaño arrived “in a small, grey helicopter [that] landed directly on the ranch” and in the area “we had (sic) something like 100 men [from the death squads] along with men from the town and the 22 that I had brought along.”

When the prosecutor asked him if the death squads received help from the public security forces, Villalba stated: “Yes, from the IV Brigade [of the army]. I am saying this because before the massacre there was a meeting; they removed troops from the checkpoints, suspending the military checkpoints on the highway.”

Villalba told the prosecutor that, prior to his testimony in February of this year, he had given details about this and other massacres to personnel from the Technical Unit of Investigations (CTI) from the Medellín Attorney General’s office

He added that he also gave tape recorded statements about the involvement of the Uribe brothers.

However “the tape-recordings ended up in the hands of Mancuso,” explained Villalba, and the CTI personnel were assassinated in September 1999.

“They killed them in Medellín, they were killed by the group from La Terraza, and they told me to keep quiet,” he said.

La Terraza is an extensive network of contract killers from Medellín that has operated under the control of powerful narco-traffickers and paramilitaries.

Asked about the meeting in which the Uribe brothers participated, Villalba said that he also discussed it on various occasions with the director of the CTI of Medellín, “a young man who wore glasses, and I told him about [the meeting at] La Caucana and he didn’t say anything, he kept silent.”

Villalba said that he also spoke about the matter with María Teresa Gallo, a special prosecutor who worked in the area of terrorism and human rights.

“She promised me many things, like a new identity, removal from prison, and to send me to another country,” he said.

In January 2007, Villalba traveled to Medellín to testify against the military officer Juan Manuel Grajales in relation to another massacre committed by paramilitaries in November 1997 at La Balsita, in the municipality of Dadeiba, in Antioquia.

During this incident 15 people were killed and, among those responsible, insists Villalba, “was Santiago, the brother of Alvaro Uribe, who lent about 20 *pelados* [hired assassins].”

Villalba was sentenced to 37 years in prison for the massacre at La Balsita. The *pelados* that the brother of President Uribe had lent belonged to the paramilitary group The Twelve Apostles, which, according to various accounts in the justice system, was controlled by Santiago Uribe.

Villalba stated that on February 13, 1998, he decided voluntarily to surrender himself to the public prosecutor’s office because he did not agree with the some of the crimes that active military officers, narco-traffickers, and paramilitaries were plotting to commit.

However the plans were carried out. According to Villalba, these men murdered the journalist and comedian Jaime Garzón, the lawyer Jaime Umaña, and the human rights activist Jesús María Valle Jaramillo.

Valle had warned, since 1996, that narco-traffickers, military officers, and death squads were preparing to carry out the massacre at El Aro. In response, President Uribe, then the governor of Antioquia, publicly accused Valle of being an enemy of the armed forces and the army prosecuted him for slander.

He was later murdered in Medellín.

Valle, claims Villalba, “was killed by the group from La Terraza and they told me to keep quiet [...] they killed him because of the investigations he was carrying out about the massacre at El Aro. He was one of the people who helped me because he knew when I surrendered and they were going to kill me so that I wouldn’t say anything.”

Villalba also said that the prosecutor that was in charge of the investigation into Valle’s death was forced to flee the country.

Apart from President Uribe and his brother Santiago, judicial records make mention of ex army general Carlos Alberto Ospina – commander of the armed forces during Uribe’s first term in office – who, at the time of the events described, was the commander of the IV Brigade of the army, stationed in Medellín, as well as army general Alfonso Manosalva Florez, who, according to witnesses like Villalba and Mancuso, gave the death squads the list of people that they were instructed to kill at La Granja and El Aro.

President Uribe highlighted Villalba’s claim that Manosalva was present at the November 1997 meeting with paramilitary leaders as one example of the inconsistencies present in his testimony, pointing out that Manosalva had passed away in April of that same year.

Villalba claims that he has been the victim of three attempts on his life. The first occurred in the prison of the city of Palmira, after Villalba had spoken to Gallo, the prosecutor.

“A guy from the auto-defense groups, Edison Parra, convicted for a murder which took place at El Llano, stabbed me on my left side, at the level of my chest.”

Two months later, “in the same location, I was given a Pony Malta [a brand name malt beverage] that had been laced with cyanide. Edwin Tirado, also from the AUC, who is now in the prison at Montería and who had worked for Mancuso, he did it.”

“The attacks are attributed to Mancuso, in those days I was testifying against the public security forces,” he added.