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Colombia: Amnesty International Condemns Deliberate Killings of Civilians by FARC Guerrillas

The recent spate of killings of civilians is a serious and deliberate breach of international humanitarian law, Amnesty International said today in response to reports of killings of civilians attributed to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), in the departments of Caquetá and Huila.

On 27 February, FARC guerrillas allegedly killed at least eight councillors in Rivera Municipality, Huila Department. The killings took place when armed men opened fire on the councillors during a council meeting. This attack follows repeated FARC threats warning councillors in Huila Department and other regions of Colombia to resign or be killed.

The killings followed an alleged FARC attack on a bus in Caquetá Department on 25 February in which at least nine civilians were killed, including two children. This attack took place after the FARC declared a ban on the movement of all vehicles in the region. In the past, FARC guerrillas have burned vehicles and killed civilians who have ignored similar bans on the movement of vehicles.

These killings raise serious concerns for the safety of state and elected officials in the run up to the 12 March congressional elections, and other civilians in other parts of the country in a context of similar restrictions on movement ordered by the FARC.

Once again, Amnesty International underlines the urgent necessity for the government and guerrilla forces to agree a humanitarian accord to remove the civilian population from the conflict. Moreover, guerrilla forces must immediately commit to respect international humanitarian law.

The Colombian authorities must ensure that those responsible for such acts are brought to justice. But Amnesty International is concerned that recent government legislation will ensure that those who violate human rights and international humanitarian law, including the security forces, army-backed paramilitaries, and the guerrilla, will succeed in evading justice. Such measures send a dangerous message to combatants that they can continue to target civilians with almost complete impunity.

