

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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Colombia: No will to uphold international humanitarian law

Amnesty International today condemned the killing of the Governor of Antioquia, Dr Guillermo Gaviria Correa and former Minister of Defence, Dr Gilberto Echeverri Mejía, together with the killing of eight members of the armed forces, all of whom were being held captive by the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

"The practice of hostage taking and the killing of prisoners are violations of International Humanitarian Law. If judicial investigations establish that the FARC executed the hostages and captured soldiers this would show a blatant disregard for international humanitarian law," Amnesty International said. Judicial investigations should also establish whether, if military operations were undertaken to rescue the captives, the security forces used excessive force in violation of international standards.

"The killing of the two hostages is particularly tragic in light of the efforts at national and international level to call on the FARC to guarantee their safety and that of other hostages," the organization added.

On Monday, 5 May 2003, the government announced that the FARC had killed the governor and former Minister of Defence. Reports broadcast in Medellín indicated that the FARC had stated it had executed the captives when army units had attempted a rescue operation.

"Amnesty International once again calls on the FARC to put an immediate end to kidnapping and hostage-taking and to immediately and unconditionally release all victims of kidnapping."

Background

In April 2002, the Governor of Antioquia, Guillermo Gaviria Correa, and his peace adviser Gilberto Echeverri, were kidnapped by the FARC whilst participating in a peace march in the department of Antioquia. This kidnapping followed that of several other prominent political figures.

In February 2002, Senator Jorge Eduardo Gechem Turbay, and the presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt as well as her campaign assistant, Clara Rojas were kidnapped. In April 2002, 12 Deputies of the Departmental Assembly of Valle del Cauca were kidnapped.

On 8 November 2002, Amnesty International wrote to the FARC denouncing these kidnappings and reiterating its condemnation of the FARC's continued practice of kidnapping. The organization

called on the FARC to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all those people it was holding as hostages and to guarantee the safety of members of the armed forces the FARC was holding captive. Amnesty International reminded the FARC that such action would be in line with its obligations under the International Humanitarian Law.

No reply was received to this letter. These killings point to a complete lack of political will to respect international humanitarian law.

Amnesty International believes that respect for international humanitarian law by guerrilla groups would represent an important step in helping to protect the civilian population from the effects of the conflict. The killings of the hostages underlines the urgency that the government and guerrilla forces reach an humanitarian agreement to help ensure that the civilian population is shielded from the conflict.

Public Document

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