

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AMR 23/028/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 081
4 April 2003

UN Commission on Human Rights: Statement on Colombia

Commission on Human Rights, 59th Session (17 March - 25 April 2003)
Agenda Item 3: 3, Organization of the work of the session (Colombia)

ORAL STATEMENT BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Chairperson,

Since the collapse in February 2002 of peace talks between the government and the armed opposition group, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the internal conflict has further intensified. This is having a devastating effect on the civilian population. The security forces and their paramilitary allies continue to be responsible for widespread and systematic violations of human rights whilst armed opposition groups continue to be responsible for numerous and repeated violations of international humanitarian law.

Amnesty International has not only observed little or no progress with regard to implementing the recommendations of the UN but the government of President Alvaro Uribe is pursuing policies which run counter to many of these recommendations. Rather than shielding civilians from hostilities, government measures risk dragging them further into the conflict. The creation of a network of civilian informants and "peasant soldiers" required to collaborate with the security forces puts civilians in danger of attacks by the other side in the conflict. Together with proposed legislation to enable civilians to bear assault weaponry and measures to grant pardons to members of illegal armed groups, these policies could lead to a reinvention and strengthening of paramilitarism. The proposal to grant judicial police powers to the armed forces may also strengthen impunity and expose human rights defenders and other civil sectors of society to arbitrary criminal investigations which will tarnish them as subversive and expose them to heightened risk of violent attack, regardless of whether or not these uncover evidence of criminal wrongdoing.

Chairperson,

On assuming office the government of President Uribe began to implement measures which run contrary to UN recommendations or which violate their spirit. Amnesty International therefore calls on the Commission on Human Rights to:

Express profound disappointment that the recommendations adopted by the 58th session of the Commission have not been implemented and urge the government to draw up a national plan of action for full and prompt implementation of the UN recommendations;

Call on the government and armed opposition groups to sign a humanitarian agreement that would protect the civilian population and ensure full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, as called for by the UN Secretary-General;

Urge the government to take urgent steps to end impunity for human rights violations by undertaking prompt and impartial investigations into all allegations of human rights violations, ensuring that those responsible stand trial in civilian courts in accordance with international standards for fair trial and refraining from introducing legislation which would grant judicial police powers to the security forces;

Urge the government to withdraw legislation which may guarantee impunity for paramilitaries and guerrillas through the granting of pardons which do not acknowledge the rights of victims of human rights abuses and their families to justice, truth and integral reparation;

Urge the government to take effective and decisive action to combat and dismantle paramilitary groups and to sever the links between the security forces and the paramilitaries; and to cease the implementation of policies which threaten to involve the civilian population in the conflict and which could result in the strengthening and re-legitimization of paramilitarism.

Urge the government to take all necessary measures to guarantee the protection of human rights defenders and to implement in full the recommendations of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on human rights defenders;

Ensure that implementation of these recommendations are monitored by appropriate UN mechanisms in advance of the 60th session of the Commission, including through the establishment of an implementation timeline and submission to the UN General Assembly of the Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia.

THANK YOU CHAIRPERSON.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>