

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Martin Ennals Award: Colombian Human Rights Defender wins 10th edition of most prestigious award of human rights movement**

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The Martin Ennals Foundation announced today that **Alirio Uribe Muñoz**, of the Collective Jose Alvear Restrepo (Colombia), has been selected as the winner of the 2003 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA).

Alirio Uribe, who works since more than 10 years for the victims of human rights violations, said that this great honor "belongs foremost to all the human rights defenders (HRDs) in Colombia who struggle in the hope that their country will one day come out of the crisis in which it now finds itself". The award is a clear message of recognition and hope for all the human rights defenders, who - like Alirio - risk their lives every day in denouncing grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law and by fighting against impunity that is rampant in their country.

In Colombia, 10 members of non-governmental organisations and 150 trade unionists have been murdered in 2001; "85% of these crimes have been committed by members of the Colombian army or the army-backed paramilitary forces". The work of HRDs is indispensable in the light of massive violations of human rights: in 2001 alone, there were 3366 political killings, 300 cases of disappearances, over 360.000 forced displacements and 1.700 people were kidnapped, while the situation during 2002 continued to deteriorate.

The award ceremony will be on 31 March 2003 in Geneva, broadcast live by Swiss Television. Barbara Hendricks will participate and sing, while the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, has agreed to hand over the award.

The **Martin Ennals Award** for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) is a unique collaboration among ten of the world's leading non-governmental human rights organizations. The Jury is composed of the following: Amnesty International, Defence for Children, German Diakonia, Human Rights Watch, HURIDOCs, International Alert, International Commission of Jurists, International Federation for Human Rights, International Service for Human Rights and World Organisation Against Torture.

The MEA, created in 1993, is granted annually to an individual or an organization who has displayed

exceptional courage in combating human rights violations. The award of 20,000 CHF is given to further human rights work. The previous 9 recipients of the MEA are: Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad (2002); Peace Brigades International, Immaculée Birhaheka, DRC; Natasa Kandic, Yugoslavia; Eyad El Sarraj, Palestine; Samuel Ruiz Garcia, Mexico; Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria; Asma Jahangir, Pakistan; Harry Wu, China (1994).

Martin Ennals (1927-1991) was instrumental to the modern human rights movement. A fiercely devoted activist, he creatively pursued ideas ahead of his time as the first Secretary-General of Amnesty International and the driving force behind many other organisations. His deep desire was to see more cooperation and solidarity among NGOs: the MEA is evidence that this is possible.

For more information on the MEA: [www.martinennalsaward.org](http://www.martinennalsaward.org).

Geneva, 5/12/02

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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>

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