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Martin Ennals Award: Colombian Human Rights Defender receives most prestigious award of human rights movement

(Geneva) The Martin Ennals Foundation is presenting today the 10th edition of the most prestigious human rights movement award to **Alirio Uribe Muñoz**, of the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (Colombia). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, will hand over the award to the Colombian human rights defender at a ceremony in Geneva to be broadcast live by Swiss Television, at which Barbara Hendriks will participate and sing.

Alirio Uribe receives the award for his work for more than 10 years with victims of human rights violations in Colombia.

"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," Amnesty International said.

In Colombia, 10 members of non-governmental organisations and 150 trade unionists were murdered in 2001; "85% of these crimes have been committed by army-backed paramilitary forces". The work of human rights defenders is indispensable in the light of massive violations of human rights: in 2001 alone, there were more than 4000 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.

Background

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.

Click on the links below to view the following videos:

history of the Martin Ennals award (English)- http://emedia.amnesty.org/ME_English.ram

history of the Martin Ennals award (French)- http://emedia.amnesty.org/ME_French.ram

video about the work of this year's winner, Alirio Uribe (Spanish)- http://emedia.amnesty.org/AU_Spanish.ram

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