

**United Nations Commission on Human Rights**

**56<sup>th</sup> session (20 March - 28 April 2000)**

**COLOMBIA**

**Item 3**

**Delivered: 14 April 2000**

Chairperson,

Against a background of a continuing escalation in the long-running armed conflict, the human rights crisis worsened.

Despite significant moves in recent months to advance peace talks between the government and the principal armed opposition groups, the armed conflict continues to escalate and to extend to new areas of the country. Principal victims of the conflict continue to be the civilian population, principally peasant farmers living in areas disputed between government forces, paramilitary organizations and armed opposition groups. At least three thousand people were victims of politically motivated violence during 1999 and an estimated 250.000 people, mainly women and children, were forcibly displaced.

The action of illegal paramilitary groups - frequently operating with the tacit or active support of the Colombian armed forces - is characterized by atrocities against the civilian population. Paramilitary forces routinely sweep through villages, torturing and murdering suspected guerrilla collaborators, burning entire villages and displacing the population. The government has persistently failed to fulfil its obligation and its commitments to dismantle paramilitary groups which continue to act with impunity throughout the country. Judicial and other independent investigations have uncovered significant evidence of continuing links between the Colombian armed forces and paramilitary groups.

The Colombian armed forces are themselves directly responsible for serious human rights violations including the massacre of civilians and the selective killing of people considered to be guerrilla sympathizers or collaborators. They have also carried out disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks resulting in civilian loss of life.

Armed opposition groups are responsible for serious and persistent violations of international humanitarian law including indiscriminate attacks causing significant civilian casualties, the recruitment of children, increasing numbers of deliberate and arbitrary killings and the kidnapping and holding hostage of hundreds of civilians.

Human rights defenders continue to be victims of harassment and attacks. Despite some government measures to improve their protection several have been killed in the last twelve months and others have had to leave the country in fear of their lives. Peace activists, trades unionists and journalists have also been particularly targeted.

Despite important efforts by the Colombian civilian justice system, impunity for human rights violations remains the norm and high-ranking members of the armed forces continue to be routinely shielded from justice by the military courts.

The Colombian government has consistently failed to implement recommendations made by the UN thematic mechanisms and by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and has rejected laws passed

by Congress designed to bring Colombian domestic legislation into line with international human rights standards.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia has played an increasingly important role since its establishment in 1997 and Amnesty International welcomes the extension of its mandate to April 2002. However, the scale and severity of the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Colombia has not yet been adequately addressed by the international community. In order for the High Commissioner's Office to effectively fulfil its mandate, it should be significantly strengthened.

Mr Chairman,

Amnesty International calls on the Commission to:

Adopt a resolution reiterating its concern at the deepening human rights crisis in Colombia  
Urge the Colombian government to take immediate steps to implement in full all UN recommendations  
Welcome the renewal of the mandate of the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Strengthen the Office of the High Commissioner with the appointment of sufficient experts to effectively fulfil the office's mandate  
Request the High Commissioner to submit her report on Colombia to the General Assembly.