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COLOMBIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES CALLS BY PROCURATOR-DELEGATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TO DISMISS ARMY BRIGADIER GENERAL

Amnesty International has welcomed the decision of the Colombian Procurator-Delegate for the Defence of Human Rights to call for the dismissal of a Brigadier General and a sergeant of the Colombian armed forces for the "disappearance", torture and murder of a political activist in 1987.

Brigadier-General Alvaro Hernán Velandia Hurtado is the highest ranking serving member of the Colombian armed forces to be subject to disciplinary sanctions for human rights violations.

"It is high time the higher ranks of the armed forces were held accountable for human rights violations", Amnesty International said today. "This is a key test of the government's resolve to tackle Colombia's human rights crisis".

In a statement issued on 6 July, the Procurator-Delegate Hernando Valencia Villa announced the conclusions of disciplinary investigations into the "disappearance" of Nydia Erika Bautista, a member of the M-19 guerrilla organisation who was abducted, tortured and murdered by military intelligence agents in Bogota in August 1987.

Dr Valencia Villa concluded that the Brigadier-General had "the responsibility and the opportunity to prevent this crime against humanity from taking place as he was fully aware of the detention".

The call for dismissals coincide with the 22 June 1995 ruling of the Cundinamarca Administrative Court, which acknowledged that the Colombian state was responsible for the death of Nydia Erika Bautista and ordered her relatives to be compensated.

Amnesty International hopes that President Ernesto Samper Pizano will use his executive authority to implement the recommendations of these findings and dismiss the Brigadier-General.

"The dismissal of Brigadier-General Velandia would set a precedent as the first time a serving general has been sanctioned as a result of disciplinary investigations, and send a message to members of the armed forces that human rights violations will not be tolerated," Amnesty International stated.

While Amnesty International welcomes the Procurator-Delegate's call for the dismissal of the Brigadier-General, it hopes that criminal investigations underway will now be advanced and those responsible for this crime be brought to justice.

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