
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 157/94

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COLOMBIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR PRESIDENT TO LIVE UP TO ELECTION PROMISES FOR IMPROVED HUMAN RIGHTS

On the eve before Ernesto Samper takes over the presidency of Colombia, Amnesty International is calling for him to live up to his election promises that international law will prevail and human rights be protected in Colombia under his administration.

In his manifesto speech to the Liberal Party Convention in March, Ernesto Samper said: "We are going to make an effort to defend and guarantee human rights. We cannot allow the great advances spelled out in the constitution of 1991 to be just empty words."

Yet empty words about human rights protection have been the hallmark of previous Colombian Governments. "Many presidents before Samper have stood by while their security forces killed, "disappeared" and tortured thousands of civilians," Amnesty International said.

According to the human rights organization there are three initial steps that the new administration should take to improve the appalling human rights situation in Colombia:

- Stamp out the impunity with which the military have been allowed to act, by bringing to justice those responsible for human rights violations and by disbanding all paramilitary groups;**
- Guarantee the safety of human rights workers - who are essential in ensuring that human rights are going to be respected in the country;**
- Establish an independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate and identify ways of improving the human rights situation in Colombia.**

The human rights organization believes that the international community can also play a key role in promoting human rights and supporting the new administration in its work to improve human rights in Colombia.

Amnesty International urges all governments to suspend military aid to Colombia unless firm guarantees can be made that this aid is not falling into the hands of human rights violators or contributing to human rights violations.

The international community should also acknowledge that the security forces systematically violate human rights and put pressure on Ernesto Samper's government to uphold their promises to protect human rights.

Ernesto Samper has promised to impose the "full weight of the law on violators of basic human rights, beginning with those employed by the state". He has also said: "There can be no room nor tolerance for paramilitarism or for private justice within a democracy."

"If he holds true to these promises, there is a real chance for improvement in the tragic human rights situation in Colombia," Amnesty International said.