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COLOMBIA: ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN MUST NOT BE A CAMPAIGN OF INTIMIDATION

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(Brussels, 15 February 2006) Impunity and attacks on freedom of expression are threatening the upcoming Congressional and Presidential elections in Colombia, says Amnesty International, in the run-up to a visit by the Andean Delegation of the European Parliament.

In its briefing to the delegation, (The Rights of Journalists, Election Candidates and Elected Officials to Campaign Without Fear of Repercussion), the human rights organisation draws attention to recent cases of attacks, threats and intimidation.

The reported attempts by both paramilitaries and guerrillas to influence the electoral process have produced a campaign of intimidation which in some instances has even led to killings. This not only undermines the rule of law in Colombia but casts doubt on the fairness of these elections.

As a result of the fear that is dominating this campaign, journalists, candidates and public officials are not able to work freely.

Amnesty International's report indicates that journalists are being forced to practise self-censorship. As a consequence, human rights abuses and attempts to pervert the electoral process are occurring without being adequately reported in the media.

"The upcoming elections are an important opportunity for the EU to pressure the Colombian authorities to put an end to the impunity that has been harming the country for so long", says Dick Oosting, director of Amnesty International's EU Office, "as a donor, the EU has special responsibility to ensure that the Colombian government lives up to its obligations".

Prior to the forthcoming visit of the Andean Delegation of the European Parliament, Amnesty International asks its participants to urge the Colombian authorities to:

Guarantee that the campaign is conducted without further violence and intimidation,
Respect the rights of journalists, public officials, candidates and voters to carry out their legal and rightful duties, free from threats,
Ensure that freedom of expression, guaranteed under Colombian law, is fully respected.

For further comment/background and interviews:

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