

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Colombia: President Uribe must reaffirm his commitment to human rights**

There can be no true respect for human rights or genuine security in Colombia if there are no real guarantees for the work of human rights defenders, said Javier Zúñiga, the head of the Amnesty International delegation, during the meeting it held yesterday with President Álvaro Uribe.

"The meeting was frank and respectful and Amnesty International reaffirmed the importance of continuing the dialogue the organization has maintained with successive Colombian governments", Javier Zúñiga said.

Amnesty International expressed its concern at recent statements by President Uribe in which he accused the organization of, "through its words and actions, [wanting] terrorism to triumph in Colombia".

"Such accusations are unfounded and unacceptable and put the legitimate work of human rights organizations, both within Colombia and abroad, at risk", said Javier Zúñiga.

The President recognized the legitimacy of the work carried out by Amnesty International and human rights defenders and said that it was his duty to protect NGOs.

For its part, the organization reaffirmed the importance of the Office in Colombia of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

"The UN recommendations and the London Agreement set the essential framework for resolving the human rights crisis," Javier Zúñiga said.

Amnesty International also reiterated its total condemnation of the human rights violations and abuses committed by the security forces, army-backed paramilitaries, and the guerrilla groups.

The organization recognized that there had been a marked drop in certain indicators of political violence such as kidnappings and displacement.

However, it expressed its concern about the negative impact the government's democratic security policy has had on human rights. This policy has not only strengthened impunity and dragged civilians further into the conflict but has also led to an increase in the number of mass arrests carried out by the security forces.

"The relentless pursuit of human rights defenders and social activists by means of mass and often arbitrary arrests is unacceptable", Javier Zúñiga said.

The death of Fredy Arias Arias, the coordinator of the Human Rights Programme run by the Kankuama Indigenous Organization, on 3 August in the city of Valledupar, allegedly at the hands of paramilitaries, illustrates the urgency of taking effective measures to protect the civilian population.

Over 90 Kankuamos have died in the past two years, mainly at the hands of paramilitaries who supposedly declared a cessation of hostilities in December 2002.

Amnesty International also expressed its deep concern at the deaths yesterday of three trade union leaders in the department of Arauca at the hands of the army.

The civilian justice system should carry out a serious investigation into the events surrounding the deaths of Alirio Martínez, president of the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (ADUC), National Association of Peasant Consumers, Leonel Goyeneche from the Confederación Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), Colombia Trade Union Confederation, in Arauca, and Jorge Prieto from the Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Hospitalarios de Colombia (ANTHOC), Colombian health workers' Union, and the CUT.

### **Background**

An Amnesty International delegation is visiting Colombia between 1 and 8 August. The delegation, which is headed by Javier Zúñiga, Senior Director-Regions, also includes Susan Lee, Regional Program Director-Americas, Eric Olson, advocacy director for the Americas in the United States Section of Amnesty International and Marcelo Pollack, Colombia Researcher.

### **Public Document**

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