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Colombia: Local government officials in the line of fire

The decision by the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)*, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, to consider mayors and councillors from Caquetá department as military targets if they do not resign is totally unacceptable, Amnesty International said today on condemning the killing yesterday of the Mayor of Solita, Caquetá, allegedly at the hands of the FARC.

The human rights organization once again urged the guerrilla group to respect the lives of all civilians in the conflict zones and their right not to be involved in hostilities.

"Under the rules of international humanitarian law governing the conduct of armed conflicts, attacks on the civilian population are prohibited," Amnesty International added.

"There is no doubt that, as long as they are participating in the conflict, local government officials are civilians and, as such, should enjoy protection under international humanitarian law."

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at the new wave of threats against mayors and councillors in several municipalities of Caquetá department, including those which make up the former demilitarized zone created to facilitate peace negotiations between the government and the FARC. In recent days, several councillors in San Vicente del Caguán have been forced to leave the area for their own safety.

"The harassment, kidnapping and even killing of local government officials is nothing new," said Amnesty International, while recalling numerous episodes of that type at the hands of guerrilla groups as well as paramilitary groups, both of which have recently intensified their threats against mayors and have carried out killings of local government officials in several parts of the country.

"It is essential that the parties to the conflict respect the lives of all civilians, including those who hold official posts in civilian government, and that the Colombian authorities take whatever measures are necessary to guarantee their security," the organization said in conclusion.

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