

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Colombia: More US military aid could fuel human rights crisis**

The US Senate's decision to lift the restrictions that have so far prevented US military aid from being used in the war against armed opposition groups in Colombia could exacerbate further the already spiralling human rights crisis in the country, Amnesty International said today.

The organization stressed that the Colombian armed forces' counter-insurgency strategy continues to be characterized -- through their continued collusion with paramilitary forces -- by the systematic and widespread violation of human rights, and warned against any dilution of the human rights conditions attached to military aid.

"Expanding and deepening US involvement in Colombia's conflict without evidence of improvements in the government's human rights policies may result in worsening an already grave human rights situation," Amnesty International added.

Earlier this year, the organization criticized the US administration's decision to release a tranche of military aid on the grounds that the human rights situation had improved and that the Colombian authorities were taking action to confront the human rights crisis.

"We have seen no decisive action to break links between the security forces and the paramilitary groups, or to combat and dismantle these groups," Amnesty International said, adding that the failure of the Colombian army to counter paramilitary forces is not due to military deficiencies -- as Colombian commanders have argued -- but rather to lack of political will.

"This is demonstrated by the fact that the sites of paramilitary bases are frequently known to the security forces and are often located in the immediate vicinity of military bases; that military units continue to carry out operations in coordination with paramilitaries; and that paramilitary groups have been shielded from arrest and prosecution because of the continued support they have received from the security forces," Amnesty International said.

"Moreover, criminal investigations into high-ranking officers implicated in serious human rights violations committed in coordination with paramilitaries have been purposefully obstructed," the organization continued.

In light of the continuing links between the Colombian security forces and paramilitary groups, Amnesty International expressed perplexity at plans to use US funds to create a special

security force unit to seek the arrest of paramilitary leaders.

"The US would be funding a Colombian military unit to pursue paramilitary leadership at a time when the Colombian army continues to condone and support paramilitary activity as an integral part of its strategy. If this does not represent cynical window-dressing it is at least a self-defeating policy," Amnesty International said.

"If the US administration were truly committed to human rights concerns, it would be insisting the Colombian government fully implement recommendations made by the United Nations to end impunity in cases of human rights violations, combat and dismantle army-backed paramilitary groups and guarantee the safety of human rights defenders and other vulnerable sectors of the civilian population," the organization continued.

"Without real action to investigate and bring to justice those members of the armed forces supporting and coordinating paramilitaries, any unit created to combat paramilitarism will be destined to failure," Amnesty International said.

"The US administration should ensure that all its policies towards Colombia contribute to confronting the human rights crisis, rather than running the risk of fuelling it," the organization added.

### **Background**

The US House and Senate have both passed the final version of the Emergency Supplemental appropriations bill which includes language lifting the restriction of US aid use to counter-narcotics efforts. The new language allows for "a unified campaign" against narcotics trafficking and "against activities by organizations designated as terrorist organizations" , "and to take actions to protect human health and welfare in emergency circumstances," such as rescue operations. With passage of the conference report in both Houses, the bill then is sent to the President for signature.

Public Document

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