

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

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Colombia: Amnesty International welcomes release of two hostages held by FARC guerrilla group

Amnesty International today welcomed the release by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) of two of its high-profile hostages.

Clara Rojas, the running-mate of former Presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt -- who is still being held by the guerrilla group -- and who was kidnapped in 2002, and former congresswoman Consuelo González, kidnapped in 2001, were released on 10 January.

The releases were facilitated by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who was also behind the failed attempt to release the same hostages at the end of last year. The two women were handed over to delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Venezuelan government in a remote area of Guaviare department in the south-east of Colombia.

Amnesty International said that hostage-taking was a flagrant breach of international humanitarian law, which can constitute a war crime.

"The FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN) must immediately and unconditionally release all civilians they have taken hostage," said Claudio Cordone, Senior Director at Amnesty International.

"The FARC and ELN must not kill and must always treat humanely those they have captured, whether they are civilians or members of the armed forces," said Cordone.

Background Information

Although kidnappings have fallen significantly in recent years, the figures remain high. More than 400 people were kidnapped in 2007, with common delinquency responsible for around half of these. The FARC, and to a lesser extent the ELN, are responsible for most conflict-related kidnappings.

The FARC continue to hold a number of high-profile hostages, including Ingrid Betancourt, kidnapped in 2002.

In June 2007, there was widespread condemnation after 11 of the 12 deputies from the Valle del Cauca Departmental Assembly, kidnapped by the FARC in April 2002, were killed in uncertain circumstances .

Over the last few years, there has been constant speculation that the FARC and the Colombian government were prepared to agree a "humanitarian exchange" -- the exchange of FARC prisoners held by the Colombian authorities for hostages held by the guerrilla group.