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Colombia: ‘War crime’ concerns over killing of captives

Amnesty International expressed concern over reports that a Colombian guerrilla group has executed four members of the country’s security forces whom it had held captive for at least 12 years.

The killings reportedly took place during a military operation to rescue soldiers and policemen held by the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in southern Colombia, on 26 November.

According to official reports, police superintendent Álvaro Moreno, police colonel Édgar Yesid Duarte, police major Elkín Hernández Rivas and army sergeant Libio José Martínez were in chains when they were shot dead at close range.

Three of the men were reportedly shot in the head, while the fourth was shot in the back. A fifth captive, police sergeant Luis Alberto Erazo, managed to escape.

“If it is confirmed that these four captives were killed in the circumstances described, this would represent a war crime,” said Marcelo Pollack, Amnesty International’s Colombia Researcher.

“The FARC has a duty to treat all captured members of the security forces humanely, in compliance with international humanitarian law.”

Amnesty International has also repeatedly called on the FARC to end the practice of kidnapping civilians and hostage-taking. The group has held some people captive for a decade or more.

The organization is calling on the Colombian authorities to ensure those responsible for the latest killings are brought to justice.

The Colombian Congress is currently debating reforms which could mean that members of guerrilla groups and the security forces could escape prosecution for serious human rights abuses. If these reforms are adopted, they might not be required to confess to such abuses in a court of law.