

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 23/019/2007 (Public)  
News Service No: 123  
28 June 2007

## Colombia: FARC and ELN must release all hostages

Amnesty International today called on the guerrilla groups Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) to immediately and unconditionally release all civilians they have abducted.

The call comes after the FARC published a press release in which the guerrilla group claimed that 11 of the 12 deputies from the Valle del Cauca departmental Assembly, kidnapped by the FARC since April 2002 – had been killed in crossfire last 18 June.

“Hostage-taking is a flagrant breach of international humanitarian law, which can constitute a war crime. The death of the 11 Valle del Cauca deputies, if confirmed, is a tragedy that could have been avoided if the FARC had been willing to respect the fundamental right of civilians not to be dragged into Colombia’s long-running armed conflict”, Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International also called on the FARC and the ELN to order their members never to kill and always treat humanely all those they have captured, including the wounded and those attempting to surrender, whether they are civilians or members of the armed forces or their paramilitary allies.

“Whilst civilians and others remain hostage to guerrilla forces their physical security remains the responsibility of the group holding them.”

### Background Information

Although kidnappings continued to fall, from 800 in 2005 to 687 in 2006, the figures remain worryingly high. Guerrilla groups, mainly the FARC and the ELN, were responsible for most conflict-related kidnappings, accounting for some 200 kidnappings. Ten were attributed to paramilitary groups and 267 to common criminals. Around 200 kidnappings could not be attributed.

The FARC continue to hold a number of high-profile hostages, including Presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and her running-mate Clara Rojas, kidnapped in 2002.

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. The government has said that its recent unilateral release of more than 100 convicted FARC prisoners, and the imminent release of others, was designed to facilitate such an exchange. The FARC have responded by refusing to negotiate an exchange until the government agrees to demilitarize two municipalities.

There is also growing speculation that the ELN and the government, who have been holding preliminary peace talks, could soon agree a temporary ceasefire, which could lead to the release of hostages held by the ELN.

Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>