

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Colombia: International community must demand action on human rights**

The international community must reaffirm its commitment to the UN human rights recommendations as the framework for resolving Colombia's long-standing armed conflict. Any disbursement of international assistance must be conditional on the Colombian government's commitment to the full and prompt implementation of the recommendations, said Susan Lee, Director of Amnesty International's Americas Programme today on the eve of the Meeting on International Cooperation, to be held on 3 and 4 February 2005 in Cartagena, Colombia.

"The human rights and humanitarian crises in Colombia remain critical with civilians targeted by all sides in the conflict -- soldiers, army-backed paramilitaries and the guerrilla," said Ms Lee.

Although there has been a fall in certain indicators of political violence, such as kidnappings, cases of torture and "disappearances" have increased, as have reports of extra-judicial executions carried out by the security forces. More than 220,000 people were forced to leave their home last year, while hundreds of civilians have been arrested, often arbitrarily, by the security forces.

In 2003, the international community adopted the London Declaration, which expressed deep concern about the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Colombia, and urged the Colombian government to promptly implement UN human rights recommendations and to take effective action against impunity and collusion, especially with paramilitary groups.

Serious questions remain unanswered regarding the paramilitary demobilization process. Since paramilitaries announced a ceasefire in 2002, they have been held responsible for over 1,900 killings and "disappearances". Some of these killings have been carried out by paramilitary units which were supposedly demobilized. Amnesty International continues to document strong links between the security forces and paramilitaries.

Many demobilized paramilitaries are also being "recycled" into the conflict, often by being required to serve as informants to the security forces. Many social and human rights activists have been detained on the basis of often spurious evidence from these informants.

An adequate legal framework for the demobilization is still not in place, while a new criminal procedure law threatens to give the Attorney General powers to block criminal investigations into suspected

human rights abusers. This has raised fears that human rights abusers, be they security force personnel, paramilitaries or guerrillas, will never be brought to justice.

"We have always called on Colombian governments to combat and disband illegal armed groups, but any demobilization must conform to international standards of truth, justice and reparation, otherwise those efforts will only strengthen impunity for human rights abusers," said Ms Lee.

Amnesty International urges the G24 group of countries to participate in the meeting organized by the Alianza coalition of Colombian NGOs, to be held in Cartagena on 2 February in order to discuss implementation of the UN recommendations with those at the forefront of the campaign for the respect for human rights.

In Cartagena, the international community must send a strong message expressing concern at the repeated failure of the Colombian government to fully and promptly implement UN human rights recommendations; reaffirming its support for the Office in Colombia of the UN High Commission for Human Rights; condemning abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict; and reiterating that it will not support any demobilization process or endorse any legislative proposal that does not take full account of victims' rights to truth, justice and reparation nor guarantee that combatants will be effectively removed from the conflict.

"The Colombian government has not only failed to comply with UN recommendations but has sought to implement policies which run counter to them. It is therefore time that the international community support the creation of an international mechanism to monitor efforts by the Colombian government to implement the recommendations once and for all," Ms. Lee concluded.

### **Background Information**

The Cartagena meeting, which will be attended by the G24 group of donor countries, the Colombian government, the Inter-American Development Bank, the UN and representatives of Colombian civil society, including human rights NGOs, is the follow-up to the July 2003 London meeting of donor countries, which resulted in the London Declaration.

The Colombian government committed to the UN human rights recommendations through its adherence to the London Declaration and is committed to implement them through the Chair's statement of the 60th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, which calls for the implementation of these recommendations. These recommendations are also in line with the human rights standards which the Colombian state is obliged to adhere to as signatory to international human rights standards.

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