

AI Index: PRE 01/260/2008  
28 October 2008

## **Colombia: Government distorts human rights situation**

(Madrid) The Colombian government is painting a positive picture of the human rights situation in Colombia, despite increasing reports of forced internal displacement, attacks against social and human rights activists and killings by security forces, said Amnesty International in a report today.

“The Colombian authorities are in absolute denial, even refusing to admit there’s an armed conflict in their country, but people are telling us a very different story,” said Marcelo Pollack, Colombia researcher at Amnesty International. “It’s impossible to solve a problem without admitting there is one. Denial only condemns more people to abuse and death.”

Amnesty International’s report is the most comprehensive up-to-date study on the state of human rights in this South American country. It shows that while some human rights indicators – such as kidnappings and the security situation in some cities – have improved over the years, many others have deteriorated.

The study also debunks statements repeated by the Colombian government, such as paramilitary groups no longer operate, human rights abusers are held into account and the work of social activists and trade unionists is being fully respected.

“For over 40 years, Colombians have been trapped in one of the worst, forgotten conflicts in the world, attacked by the security forces, paramilitaries and guerrilla groups, while the government fails to take any meaningful action to protect them,” said Marcelo Pollack.

“To reverse Colombia’s tragic reality the government and guerrilla groups must once and for all remove the civilian population from the conflict.”

Amnesty International’s study shows that across Colombia:

At least 1,400 civilians were killed in 2007, up from 1,300 in 2006. Of the cases where the perpetrator is known, the security forces were responsible for at least 330 of these, the paramilitaries for around 300 and the guerrilla for some 260.

As many as 305,000 Colombians were displaced in 2007, compared with 220,000 in 2006.

At least 190 people were victims of either enforced disappearances by the security forces and paramilitaries or missing following abductions by guerrilla groups in 2007, up from around 180 in 2006.

Amnesty International is calling on all parties to the Colombian conflict to demonstrate the political will to end human rights abuses. The organization also urges the international community to make greater efforts to

ensure that both sides of the conflict respect the human rights of Colombians.

#### Note to Editors

Amnesty International's report, "'Leave us in peace!' Targeting civilians in Colombia's internal armed conflict", is a comprehensive study of the state of human rights in Colombia. It includes a series of recommendations which, if adopted by the government and guerrilla forces, could contribute to ending the country's human rights tragedy.

The report recounts the stories of those individuals and communities hardest hit by the conflict, including members of afro-descendant, indigenous and campesino communities killed or displaced from their homes; the victims of kidnappings; women and girls raped; children recruited by paramilitary and guerrilla groups or maimed by landmines; communities taking an active stand to defend their right not to be drawn into the conflict; and human rights defenders and trade unionists whose work in defence of human rights has cost them their lives.