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EXTERNAL -- FOR RESPONSE

**PUBLIC STATEMENT
COLOMBIA
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REGRETS DEATH OF KIDNAPPED OIL WORKER**

Amnesty International expressed today its regret at the death of a French geologist who had been kidnapped by the National Liberation Army (ELN) on 23 November 1998.

Claude Steinmentz, who was working for a company under contract to British oil giant BP Amoco, reportedly died of a heart attack on 4 March 1999, while still held in captivity.

His death came on the same day that three US environmental activists -- Ingrid Washinawatok, Lahe'ena Gay and Terence Freitas -- were killed by kidnappers. The body of Claude Steinmentz was handed over to an official of the International Committee of the Red Cross near BP Amoco's Cusiana-Cupiagua oilfield in north-east Colombia.

Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned the taking and holding of hostages in all cases and reiterated today its grave concern about the escalating human rights crisis in the country.

The organization is calling on all parties to the long-running armed conflict in Colombia -- armed opposition groups, the Colombian armed forces and paramilitary groups operating with their support or acquiescence -- to ensure full compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law.

In particular, Amnesty International is urging them to guarantee the protection of civilians, including human rights workers and foreign nationals, who are frequently the target of kidnapping and other serious human rights abuses.

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