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## **Colombia: summary justice no response to human rights abuses**

The killings by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) of three US indigenous rights activists must be fully and impartially investigated and those responsible be brought to justice, Amnesty International said today strongly condemning this crime.

“Justice in the case of the three activists killed earlier this week can only be achieved through a trial conducted according to international fair trial standards,” the organization said.

Amnesty International welcomed the step taken by the FARC leadership in acknowledging responsibility for the crime. The guerrilla group announced their intention to try the local commander believed to be responsible for the kidnap and subsequent murder of the three US citizens.

A FARC spokesperson informed the media of their intention to conduct the trial according to the internal disciplinary code of the guerrilla group, whose maximum punishment is execution by firing squad.

“There are serious concerns that the trial will be conducted summarily and may result in a death sentence,” Amnesty International said.

“The FARC’s internal disciplinary code and the judicial procedures under which the trial will take place fall short of international fair trial standards.”

There is also particular concern that the FARC may attempt to complete the proceedings and carry out the possible execution very rapidly.

“The death penalty is no response to human rights abuses -- it is itself a violation of the basic human right to life,” said Amnesty International, which opposes this ultimately cruel punishment in all cases.

### **Background**

Although the FARC initially denied involvement in the crime, an internal investigation led to the identification of a group of FARC fighters as responsible for the deliberate and arbitrary killing of the three US citizens. This group, under the command of "Gildardo", allegedly acted independently of the organization’s leadership.

Terence Freitas, Lahe’na’e Gay and Ingrid Washinawatok had travelled to Colombia in February as part of an international campaign by environmental groups to support the U’wa indigenous community in the north-east of the country. On 25 February their car was intercepted by two armed men in civilian clothes as they travelled to the airport in Saravena, Arauca

Department. Their bound and blindfolded bodies were found on 4 March dumped over the border in Venezuela. They had been shot dead. On 10 March, after a week of speculation, the FARC admitted responsibility for the killings.

Lahe'ena Gay was the director of the Hawaii-based Pacific Cultural Conservancy International, Ingrid Washinawatok a native American and Terence Freitas an environmental scientist who had been coordinating the international campaign in favour of the U'wa indigenous group since 1997 and had visited Colombia on several previous occasions.

For several years the U'wa, with the help of environmentalists in the USA, have been fighting plans by an oil company affiliated to the US Occidental Petroleum Corporation (OPC) to exploit oil deposits on their ancestral lands.

Kidnapping and hostage taking by armed opposition groups are widespread in Colombia. During 1998 at least 600 people, including several foreigners, were kidnapped by armed opposition groups. Most were released after weeks or months in captivity. However, others were killed during rescue attempts or when ransom demands were not met.

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