

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL EU OFFICE PRESS RELEASE

### **EMBARGO: 09.00 BRUSSELS TIME (08.00 GMT) MONDAY 1 DECEMBER**

#### **EU-COLOMBIA: EU MUST SEND STRONG MESSAGE TO COLOMBIAN VICE-PRESIDENT SAYS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

(Brussels 1 December 2003) The European Union must use its leverage as a major aid donor to Colombia to demand of the Colombian Vice-President, during his meetings in Brussels today and tomorrow, that United Nations human rights recommendations for the country are implemented urgently.

The Colombian Vice-President Francisco Santos Caldern meets EU High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana today, and External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten tomorrow.

He will also take part in a round table meeting in Brussels today with the Director of the UNHCHR Office in Colombia, the UN Secretary General's Special Advisor for Colombia, representatives of EU institutions and Member States, and non-governmental human rights organisations. The round table will discuss the state of compliance with UN recommendations on human rights and international humanitarian law.

Amnesty International recalls that after negotiations with the EU, the Colombian government gave a formal commitment at the last session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, that Colombia would implement specific UN human rights recommendations.

These relate to ensuring that human rights violators and abusers are brought to justice, that paramilitary groups are disbanded, that new legalized paramilitary-type structures are dismantled and that protection of vulnerable sectors of civil society is guaranteed. The UN has also called on guerrilla groups to adhere fully to international humanitarian law.

There has been little or no progress made on implementation of the UN recommendations, in fact the government is implementing policies which are contrary to these recommendations. The Colombian government is becoming increasingly hostile towards human rights and other civil society organisations, creating serious obstacles to their work and security.

"Amnesty International is concerned that paramilitary groups, far from being demobilized, are reportedly being recycled into private security firms, for example, in Medellin, where pressure is being exerted on the civilian population to pay for security. There is also no guarantee that they will not be incorporated into other structures set up by the government, such as the army of 'peasant soldiers'," Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office said.

Like the UN, Amnesty International has repeatedly called for decisive action on the part of the Colombian government to combat and dismantle paramilitary groups, and investigate their links with Colombian security forces.

In addition, as recently as two weeks ago, the UN Committee Against Torture expressed serious concerns regarding new anti-terrorist laws which could justify the use of torture. These new laws give judicial powers to the military, and suspend penalties for armed groups that disarm voluntarily, even if they are accused of serious human rights violations.

"These developments contradict claims by the Colombian government, most recently set out in the declaration released after July's International Support for Colombia meeting in London, that they will

implement UN recommendations on human rights," Dick Oosting said.

"If the EU allows the Colombian government to flout its human rights commitments, the EU will effectively undermine UN efforts to help solve the human rights crisis in the country. Without the implementation of the UN recommendations, the EU can have no guarantee that its aid is not contributing to further human rights abuses."

**For further comment/background and interviews:**

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