

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## Colombia: Kidnapping of bishop highlights vulnerability of civilians in conflict

The kidnapping of two members of the clergy yesterday, supposedly at the hands of a guerrilla group, is yet another example of the blatant disregard of armed actors in the Colombian conflict for the rights of civilians, Amnesty International said today, condemning the abduction.

Jorge Enrique Jiménez, Catholic bishop of the city of Zipaquirá and President of the Latin American Episcopal Commission, was abducted along with another priest, Desiderio Orejuela, near to the town of Pacho, 35 miles north of the Colombian capital, Bogotá. Their driver was also kidnapped but was later released. Colombian military sources have indicated that the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) were responsible.

"Kidnapping and hostage-taking -- which recur with appalling frequency in the context of the Colombian conflict -- are in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law," Amnesty International said, renewing its call on all parties to the conflict to immediately desist from these practices and to abide by the rules of international humanitarian law providing for the protection of civilians.

The organization took the opportunity to remember the countless forgotten victims of kidnapping in the hands of different armed groups, and called for the respect of their rights to life and physical integrity, and for the release of all civilian hostages including Bishop Jiménez and Father Orejuela.

"The use of human lives as bargaining chips for the advancement of political, military or economic interests is completely unacceptable," Amnesty International said.

### Background

In 2001 alone, 3000 kidnappings were recorded in Colombia. It is estimated that approximately 60% of these were the responsibility of armed opposition groups, while around 8% have been attributed to paramilitaries (who in recent times have increasingly resorted to hostage-taking). The rest of the kidnappings are believed to be criminal in nature.

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