

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/049/2009
02 February 2009

Colombia: Amnesty International welcomes new release of hostages by the FARC

Amnesty International today welcomed news that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) are expected to release a number of high-profile hostages, including former governor Alan Jara and regional deputy Sigifredo López.

Yesterday, the FARC released three police officers and a soldier, and it is expected that Alan Jara, kidnapped by the FARC in 2001, will be released later today, and former regional deputy Sigifredo López, kidnapped in 2002, on Wednesday.

"The release of the hostages is great news but the reality is that there're still many being held by the FARC and the ELN across Colombia," said Marcelo Pollack, Colombia researcher at Amnesty International. "All hostages must be urgently and unconditionally released."

These latest releases were facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Brazilian government and Colombian congresswoman Piedad Córdoba, and are the latest in a series of releases of high-profile hostages over the last year.

Nevertheless, Amnesty International reiterates that hostage-taking is a serious violation of international humanitarian law, which can constitute a war crime.

"Guerilla groups must always treat those they have captured humanely, whether they are civilians or members of the armed forces. The humane treatment of anyone held by the FARC and ELN must never be made contingent upon the authorities complying with their demands," said Marcelo Pollack.

Background Information

Although kidnapping and hostage-taking have fallen significantly in recent years, the figures remain high. Guerrilla groups are responsible for the vast majority of cases of hostage-taking and kidnapping carried out in the context of the armed conflict. Hundreds of hostages are still being held by the FARC and, to a lesser extent, by the ELN.

Over the last few years, there has been constant speculation that the FARC and the Colombian government were prepared to agree a "humanitarian exchange" -- the exchange of FARC prisoners held by the Colombian authorities for hostages held by the guerrilla group.