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## **Colombia: Stop false accusations against human rights groups, government should address reported abuses**

(Washington/London) President Álvaro Uribe of Colombia should stop making false and dangerous accusations against human rights groups that criticize his government, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said today in a joint statement. Colombia should instead address the human rights concerns they raise.

Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International issued reports in October about the human rights situation in Colombia. After their reports were released, President Uribe accused Amnesty International of "blindness", "fanaticism" and "dogmatism". He also publicly accused José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch, of being a "supporter" and an "accomplice" of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas.

"We would welcome a chance to debate the real issues with the president," said Susan Lee, Americas director for Amnesty International. "But these statements belittle his office and give a green light to those who wish to harm human rights activists in Colombia."

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are still waiting for the Colombian government to provide measured and detailed responses to the serious human rights concerns raised in their two reports.

Earlier this year, after a presidential advisor, José Obdulio Gaviria, publicly suggested that organizers of a protest against paramilitary death squads had links to guerrillas, there was a wave of threats and violence against participants in and organizers of the march, including killings.

The organizations noted that President Uribe and other senior officials have often made similar accusations against those who criticize or stand in the way of his policies, including not only international and Colombian human rights groups, but also the Colombian Supreme Court, trade unionists, and prominent journalists.

"These ridiculous accusations are symptomatic of an administration that refuses to be held accountable for what it does," said José Miguel Vivanco of Human Rights Watch. "Instead of taking the country's human rights problems seriously, the Uribe government has sought to deflect criticism by simply accusing the critics -- no matter who they are -- of links to guerrillas."

For a copy of Amnesty International's report "'Leave us in peace!' Targeting civilians in Colombia's internal armed conflict", please see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/023/2008/en>

For a copy of Human Rights Watch's report "Breaking the Grip? Obstacles to Justice for Paramilitary Mafias in Colombia", please see: [www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/10/16/breaking-grip](http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/10/16/breaking-grip)