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EU-Andean Community: serious human rights concerns to address

(Brussels, 17 April) As the EU Presidency prepares to meet representatives of the Andean Community in Santo Domingo, Amnesty International urged it to raise a number of human rights issues that continue to affect the region, in particular Colombia and Peru. (Letter available at www.amnesty-eu.org)

In Colombia, human rights defenders continue to be threatened, attacked and even killed. On 31 January, a human rights campaigner was repeatedly shot by gunmen suspected of links to paramilitary groups. Her death is believed to be linked to her work with victims of human rights abuses at the hearing of paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso.

At the same time, the on-going paramilitary demobilisation process is showing little result. It has not weakened the military political and economic infrastructure of these forces that continue to operate, sometimes in collusion with the security forces.

Amnesty International is further concerned that paramilitaries may soon be able to legalize ownership of land and other assets, stolen through war crimes and crimes against humanity. It therefore urges the EU to desist from supporting governmental programmes such as the “rural reinsertion” scheme that can facilitate legal ownership of such lands.

“It will be a crucial mistake for the EU to support a programme which will very likely cause further injustice and fuel Colombia’s violent tensions” said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International’s EU Office.

In Peru, current attempts to broaden the use of the death penalty would entail the country’s withdrawal from the American Convention of Human Rights (ACHR). Given that domestic courts do not provide effective remedy for human rights violation this move would effectively remove regional protection for citizens.

“As a staunch opponent of capital punishment, the EU has a special responsibility to speak out against these attempts and to alert Peruvian representatives to the consequences of abandoning the ACHR – a move that would primarily affect ordinary citizens”, said Oosting.

Finally, Amnesty International recommends that the EU delegation supports Peru’s request for the extradition from Chile of former President, Alberto Fujimori, who faces serious charges related to human rights violations, corruption and money laundering.

The Chilean Supreme Court is expected to decide in May on Peru’s request for extradition. Should the Court deny the request, the Chilean authorities should investigate and, if the evidence is sufficient, bring Fujimori to trial.

BACKGROUND:

The EU has established a formal political dialogue with the Andean Community (comprised of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) since the mid-1990s. It covers issues such as support for democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, progress in regional integration, as well as the fight against drugs and a favourable trade regime.