

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### COLOMBIA: HUMAN RIGHTS MUST BE CENTRE STAGE IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Respect for human rights should be a top priority for all the presidential candidates, Amnesty International said today as it sent an open letter to all those standing in the 30 May presidential poll.

In the letter, which is also being made public today, Amnesty International outlines its key human rights concerns and asks the presidential candidates to clearly set out the policies which they will pursue and the specific measures they will implement to ensure full respect for human rights in Colombia.

“Although the candidates briefly referred to human rights in a questionnaire published last week by the Colombian weekly *Semana*, it is still frankly shocking that, in a country where human rights are routinely abused by those participating in the 45-year old internal armed conflict, the issue has not been given the priority it deserves”, said Susan Lee, Amnesty International’s Americas Director.

In an effort to push the issue of human rights up the electoral agenda, the National and International Campaign for the Right to Defend Human Rights and *Medios para la Paz* have invited the vice-presidential candidates to participate in a debate on human rights in Bogotá, Colombia, on 5 May.

“This event is an important opportunity for the candidates to debate human rights and to make firm commitments in response to the questions posed both by Amnesty International in its open letter, as well as by those participating in the event. As such, we sincerely hope and strongly urge the vice-presidential candidates to demonstrate their unequivocal commitment to ending the human rights crisis by participating in this event”, said Susan Lee.

In its letter the organization condemns the failure of all the parties to the conflict – be they the guerrilla, paramilitary groups or the security forces – to protect civilians from the human rights consequences of the conflict and to respect their right not to be drawn into the hostilities. Amnesty International also highlights how impunity, more than any other factor, has been responsible for prolonging the human rights crisis.

“Every year, hundreds of thousands of civilians are forced to flee their homes because of the conflict, while many others are threatened, killed, disappeared or kidnapped. The situation faced by Indigenous Peoples, and Afro-descendant and peasant farmer communities, as well as by human rights defenders, is especially precarious. We simply need to know what the new president will do about it”, said Susan Lee.

Despite some advances in some high-profile criminal investigations into human rights abuses, impunity remains the norm and most perpetrators have never been identified, let alone investigated by the courts.

“The sad truth is that the vast majority of human rights abusers continue to simply get away with it, while many of those involved in key investigations where some progress is being made, such as lawyers, public prosecutors, judges and witnesses, are routinely threatened or killed. The new government must be clear about what it will do to ensure that the victims and their families receive the justice they deserve”.

“We hope that all the candidates will send out a clear message that, if elected, they will have the political determination to put an end to many decades of human rights abuses and to overcome the endemic and shameful impunity that has ensured that such abuses continue to this day”, said Susan Lee.

For further information, read the open letter here: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/013/2010/en>

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