

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL EU OFFICE PRESS RELEASE**

**EU-LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN SUMMIT: PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

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(Brussels, 10 May 2006) The fate of those who risk their lives to promote human rights should be a prime concern of the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit, says Amnesty International.

The government representatives meeting tomorrow in Vienna face a disturbing record: there have been more killings of human rights defenders in this region than anywhere else in the world.

“Governments should be confronted with these numbers. Unless they create a safe environment, human rights defenders will continue to have no one to turn to for protection”, says Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International’s EU Office.

Those who denounce human rights abuses face an intolerable degree of hostility and threats, Amnesty International’s investigations have shown. In recent years journalists, lawyers, trade unionists and many others have been persecuted.

“The EU has committed itself to protecting human rights defenders around the world. It should use this occasion to ask for concrete steps from these governments”, said Oosting.

One of the priorities is putting an end to impunity. Very few perpetrators of human right abuses are brought to justice and those who do face trials are often set free. This reinforces the oppressive climate of fear that human rights defenders are faced with.

In countries with armed conflicts, it is not just activists that are at risk but the entire population. In Colombia, for example, tens of thousands of people have been killed, "disappeared," tortured or kidnapped, while millions of others were forcibly displaced in the past four decades.

Amnesty International urges that further to the declaration of Guadalajara of 2004, which aimed at increasing social cohesion, the EU and its Latin America and Caribbean partners take this opportunity to:

- End impunity for human rights abuses by ratifying the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court and enacting necessary implementing legislation;
- Recognize the crucial role of human rights defenders and provide them with the protection they require;
- Support the development of a global treaty to regulate the international arms trade.

**For further comment/background and interviews:**

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