

The International Office on Human Rights – Action Colombia, represents a network of 32 European organisations. From its office in Brussels the organisation accompanies initiatives of Colombian civil society in the search for the full respect of all human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as a negotiated solution to the armed conflict.

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Oidhaco calls for peace gestures from the Government and the guerrilla in Colombia

The EU must speak out in favour of a negotiated solution to the armed conflict in Colombia

- **Colombia must realize after five decades of conflict, that the war cannot be ended by military means**
- **Oidhaco asks the EU to help the government and the guerrillas to open pathways leading to a real peace process and that the active participation of civil society is a priority in this process**
- **Colombian organizations working for a negotiated solution to the armed conflict need public support from the EU**
- **Oidhaco supports the nomination of the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado, for the EU Parliament Sakharov Prize**

Brussels, September 20, 2011. The Colombian government recently acknowledged the existence of an armed conflict in Colombia. This conflict has created millions of victims. Each year the number of internally displaced persons rises, with 280,000 newly-displaced in 2010 alone, according to Colombian NGO the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (*Consultoría por los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento* – CODHES). Between 2008 and 2010 there were 691 cases of civilians wounded and 131 civilians killed by landmines, according to the Colombian Presidential Program for Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines. There are more than 26,000 forcibly disappeared persons, recognized by the Attorney General's Office. All armed groups continue to use sexual violence as a strategy and weapon of war and terror. Children are forcibly recruited by all sides, either as combatants or collaborators. The recognition of the conflict was a necessary political move. Now is the time to go further. The Colombian government and the guerrillas have to demonstrate to Colombians their willingness to end this conflict. And the European Union must do everything in its power to make this possible.

To mark the **International Day of Peace** this September 21 Oidhaco asks the EU to contribute to putting peace in Colombia back on the world agenda. **Vincent Vallies**, spokesperson for **Oidhaco**, stresses that "The EU must show its commitment to peace in Colombia. One important step would be to publicly support and participate in peace initiatives organised by Colombian civil society". There are a number of initiatives which seek peaceful solutions to the armed conflict and aim to open up pathways for peace building.

"The EU can put back on the international agenda the need to end a conflict that has dragged on for decades" - says Vallies. "Europe has a strong presence in Colombia," the Oidhaco spokesman continues. "This presence should not be limited to cooperation and trade but must go further. The EU must make efforts to monitor respect for human rights and undertake diplomatic initiatives to search for a negotiated and sustainable end to the armed conflict."

A number of communities in Colombia have decided to peacefully resist the war. Among a number of initiatives, Oidhaco highlights **the Peace Community of San José de Apartado** which is among this year's nominees for the **European Parliament's Sakharov Prize**. If the Community were to win this prize, it would send an important message that members of the European Parliament support this type of Colombian civil society peace initiative.

In Colombia many events have also been held in the search for peace, such as the recent "**National Meeting of Small Farmers, Afro-descendants and Indigenous Peoples for Land and Peace in Colombia**", held in Barrancabermeja during the month of August. In this event all the participants concluded that there is a real urgency to build peace in Colombia. For its part, the organization Colombians for Peace (*Colombianas y Colombianos por la Paz*), works tirelessly to achieve rapprochement between the guerrillas and the Colombian government and the release of the hostages deprived of their liberty.

Oidhaco also highlights that peace in Colombia does not only mean the end of the war, but the organization stresses that this is a fundamental step. Building a lasting and sustainable peace can only be achieved via the active participation of different sectors of Colombian society, via an end to all human rights violations and via the achievement of social justice.

Oidhaco also calls upon both the government and the guerrillas to respect the rules of International Humanitarian Law and to send a clear message via gestures of good will, that both parties are ready to begin talks for a negotiated solution to this war. President Santos has spoken of peace and the FARC and ELN have expressed their desire for an eventual negotiated approach. But none of them has launched a clear signal showing their will to begin real dialogue. Meanwhile, as more time is lost, the numbers of victims continue to rise.