

International Women's Day

## We call for support from the European Union for women victims of the conflict in Colombia

**Brussels, March 07, 2013.** Colombian women, especially human rights defenders, women in situations of forced displacement, indigenous leaders, small-scale producers and afro-descendant women have been the invisible victims of the armed conflict in Colombia for over five decades. In fact, the “general agreement for ending the conflict and building a stable and lasting peace” between the Colombian government and the FARC does not contemplate any differential gender focus. This is discouraging in terms of the space women will have to participate in the process and whether their proposals will be heard. *“Their active participation in the process of building a lasting peace is indispensable. They need the support of the EU”*, said **Oidhaco** spokesperson, Vincent Vallies. Colombia will not find the way to building a lasting peace without the active participation of victims, as MOVICE recalled yesterday on March 6 during the public delivery of its peace proposals.

The Office in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in its latest report that acts of sexual violence continue, committed by the military, as well as by the guerrillas and paramilitary groups (“post-demobilization” groups). **Practically all of these crimes remain unpunished.** According to figures from the Attorney General’s Office, as of April 2011, only 842 cases of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict were being heard in the ordinary courts, and of these, 98.6% remain unpunished. The OHCHR has reminded the Colombian government that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict *“emphasized the need for the Ministry of Defence to review its zero tolerance policy on sexual violence, as previously recommended by the High Commissioner”*.

Just a few days ago, Angélica Bello, a renowned defender of the rights of women victims of sexual violence in the armed conflict, was found dead. Angélica's story sums up the drama of thousands of Colombian women: she was displaced three times, her daughters became sex slaves of the paramilitaries, and she herself was a victim of rape which aimed to silence her. Although she had been granted security measures by the government, her death remains unexplained, and occurred three days after she received threats that she would be killed if she did not immediately leave the place where she lived.

**Oidhaco** is deeply concerned by the dramatic situation faced by millions of women victims of armed conflict. *“We call upon the government to effectively protect women leaders of processes to demand rights for victims and for all women”*, said **Vincent Vallies**, spokesperson for the organisation based in Brussels. *“The government must also comply fully with the recommendations of the United Nations system relating in particular to the human rights of women”*.

**Oidhaco** explicitly calls on the EU to publicly support women victims of armed conflict, to demand that Bogotá guarantees protection for women who fight for their rights and for access to justice, and to demand an end to the impunity enjoyed by all those who have attacked Colombian women within the context of the conflict.

Moreover, **Oidhaco** reminds the parties in the armed conflict and all actors that *“in these dialogues it is important to remember that peace is built through the proposals for the country that come from the people, women, small-scale producers, indigenous peoples, victims and others. These people know how their country could live in peace. We hope that the European Union understands this message and supports the participation of civil society”*.

*The International Office on Human Rights - Action Colombia, represents a network of more than 30 European organisations. From its headquarters in Brussels, Oidhaco accompanies Colombian civil society initiatives which work towards the full respect of human rights and international humanitarian law, and a negotiated solution to the internal armed conflict. Since 2012, Oidhaco has been granted Special Consultative Status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council.*