

Human Rights in Colombia, an item for the agenda of the new European Parliament

Brussels, May 26, 2014. The International Office on Human Rights - Action Colombia (**Oidhaco**) comprising 35 organisations from countries of the EU, Switzerland and Norway, welcomes the new European Parliament, and asks that it pays particular attention to the issue of human rights and specifically, that the situation in Colombia, a country with which the EU has privileged trade relations, is actively included in its agenda.

Colombia is immersed in a process of peace talks between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC guerrillas, and like all countries in the midst of peace processes, needs the support of the international community and the Union European in particular, to help the country along the pathway to true and lasting peace that could begin with an end to the armed conflict between the two players sitting at the table in Havana. Unfortunately the European Union has for many years now neglected the major problems faced by Colombia, as its main focus has been concentrated on trade issues, specifically in the negotiation, signing and ratification of the Free Trade Agreement. The new European Parliament has the ability to influence the policies of the European Union towards Colombia.

“Human rights are an item for the European Parliament’s agenda on Colombia”, says **Oidhaco** spokesperson, **Vincent Vallies**. “In **Oidhaco** we are convinced that this is a crucial moment for this country. If there is an agreement signed to end the armed confrontation between FARC guerrillas and the Colombian State, the European Parliament could advocate for the EU to contribute to solving the structural problems that have been fuelling the armed conflict”, continues **Vallies**.

Colombia is suffering the worst humanitarian crisis in the West and every day the situation becomes more serious, yet it is one of the most overlooked crises in the world. “We call upon the new European Parliament to help put on the European and international political agenda, the solution to the human rights crisis in Colombia, which includes victims from all ethnic, economic, social, and cultural sectors in the country”, states **Vallies**. “The European Parliament should offer itself as a platform for Colombian victims and organisations, to listen to them and take action to help resolve underlying problems which have existed for decades”, continues the organisation’s spokesperson.

“**Oidhaco** calls upon the European Parliament to stand in solidarity with the victims, and to adopt a critical stance by making demands upon the Colombian government in relation to the serious violations of human rights. The EU should focus its cooperation with Colombia on strong support for civil society initiatives, in particular organisations of victims, Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples. Without that it will be difficult for Colombia to find true peace, despite an agreement in Havana to end the armed conflict with the FARC”, concludes **Vallies**.

For further information, contact Vincent Vallies on (0032) 2 536 1913.

The International Office on Human Rights - Action Colombia, represents a network of 35 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.