

Serious violations of the civilian population's human rights and infractions of International Humanitarian Law, in confrontations between the FARC and the Colombian Army.

“We support the indigenous people of Cauca in their peaceful resistance and search for peace”

Brussels, 19 July 2012. Oidhaco supports the decision of the indigenous peoples of the Cauca department in the south-west of Colombia who, after suffering renewed serious human rights violations and infractions of IHL, have decided to reject all armed presence in their lands.

Throughout past weeks, hundreds of civilians from the department of Cauca have been injured and thousands displaced, as a consequence of bombardments and armed confrontation between the FARC and the Colombian army. According to figures from the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, in Toribío, at least 14 people were injured and 400 displaced, in the majority indigenous peopleⁱ. And in Argelia, some 1,500 civilians have been displaced, with 74 houses, one school and two community centres seriously damagedⁱⁱ.

Because of its strategic location and richness in natural resources, Cauca is one of the areas which has been most affected by the war in Colombia. Multiple attacks have been registered against the civilian population committed by the guerrilla and by the Colombian army and paramilitary groups. This situation affects the whole population, especially women and children, because of their particular vulnerability towards those who carry out the violence, and also indigenous peoples, because of the pressure from different armed actors in the conflict on their land.

Faced with this situation, the indigenous peoples of Cauca are demanding the withdrawal of soldiers, paramilitaries and the guerrilla from their lands. On 17 July 2012, they removed soldiers from the base in Toribío, which has led to a strong reaction from the Colombian government who have announced that they will prosecute the indigenous people involved. It is of serious concern that the government persists with the armed conflict, thereby reaffirming their will to continue militarizing the area. We reject the stigmatisation of indigenous peoples for their supposed infiltration by the FARC; their criminalisation because of their removal of the soldiers; and their repression by the army over their legitimate claims. Far from responding to the call of the indigenous people for a dialogue for peace these events contribute to the worsening of tension and to the revictimization of the indigenous peoples. We must remember that the Constitutional Court in Ruling 004 of 2009, declared 34 peoples to be at risk of extinction, including several from Cauca, including the Nasa People, direct victims of what is currently occurring in the region.

Oidhaco, formed of more than 30 European and international organisations, calls upon Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for External Affairs and Security Policy, and upon the EU member states, to express their support for the demands of the indigenous peoples of Cauca in favour of peace and against the war. “The EU must call upon the Colombian government to accept a ceasefire in the region and the opening of a dialogue for peace in which civil society can participate”, said **Christiane Schwarz**, president of **Oidhaco**. Our network joins the solidarity expressed by **Podec** (Coordination Group of European Development NGOs in Colombia) and supports the “peaceful resistance for human rights of the indigenous peoples of Colombia, the respect for their lands, their authorities, their autonomy and their lives” as well as “the civilian non-violent action of the indigenous guard”.

Oidhaco calls upon all armed actors to respect International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights.

Finally, **Oidhaco** rejects the statements against the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca - CRIC) made on an RCN radio program by Francisco Santos, a partner in RCN and in the newspaper El Tiempo, and Vice-president during the last government, as well as the acts of intimidation which occurred in Popayán at the beginning of this weekⁱⁱⁱ.

The International Office on Human Rights - Action Colombia, represents a network of more than 30 European organisations. From its office 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

ⁱ In Amnesty International, Urgent action - civilians at risk as fighting escalates, 17 July 2012

ⁱⁱ According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, in Amnesty International, prec.

ⁱⁱⁱ Around 20 latest model vehicles stationed outside of the CRIC offices, some of the drivers got out and shouted slogans such as "get out indigenous people of Cauca" and "Long live Uribe", in support of the actions of the armed forces, and rejecting their expulsion by the indigenous people (*CRIC, S.O.S CAUCA, Hostigamiento contra la sede del Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca -CRIC-, 18 July 2012*)