

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 31 March 2016.

**Oidhaco Welcomes the Announcement of the Public Phase of Peace Talks
between the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army - ELN**

On 30 March 2016, the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army (el Ejército de Liberación Nacional -ELN) jointly announced the beginning of the public phase of peace talks, following more than two years of closed-door negotiations. The headquarters for these talks will be in Ecuador, however sessions will also be held in Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba and Chile, with the governments of these countries, as well as that of Norway, acting as guarantors in the process. The agenda for discussion will be based on the following points: (1) Participation of society in peace building, (2) Democracy for peace, (3) Transformations for peace, (4) Victims, (5) Ending the armed conflict, and (6) Implementation.

On various occasions, **Oidhaco** has highlighted before the European Union, Norwegian and Swiss institutions, the importance of moving forward in the process between the Colombian government and the ELN, in order to reach a political solution to the armed conflict and a lasting peace in Colombia. Oidhaco is convinced that the armed conflict will not be brought to an end through military means, but through peaceful and participatory dialogue, which includes representatives of Colombian civil society, victims, community leaders, indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples, and women, among others. In this sense, Oidhaco welcomes the inclusion of the participation of society in peace building, as well as victims, as two core points in the agreed agenda.

Oidhaco urges the various EU, Norwegian and Swiss institutions to back the initiatives of Colombian civil society and to support the demands of victims, permitting their full participation in this process. Oidhaco believes it is fundamental that this peace process is based on International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law, and guarantees respect for the four pillars of transitional justice; truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of no-repetition.

Oidhaco acknowledges the assignment of Mr. Eamon Gilmore as EU Envoy for the Peace Process in Colombia, as well as the resolution supporting the peace process approved by the European Parliament in January 2016, and calls on the EU to extend these demonstrations of support to the public peace talks to be held between the Colombian government and the ELN. Moreover, Oidhaco urges the EU, Norway and Switzerland to back calls made by various human rights organisations to generate security guarantees for Colombian civil society participants in these peace talks. Oidhaco reiterates the need to monitor the human rights context in the country, in particular the situation of human rights defenders, who have recently suffered a wave of attacks and killings.

