

<http://lipietz.net/Round-table-Colombia-Human-Rights-Defenders-the-collateral-damage>

Parlement européen (Bruxelles)

# Round table Colombia. Human Rights Defenders : the "collateral damage"

- Vie publique - Apparitions publiques - Conférences, débats -



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## Table-ronde sur les défenseurs des droits de l'homme en Colombie, co-organisée par Hélène Flautre et Alain Lipietz, Députés européens, Les Verts/Ale

### Background

In a context of increasing internal armed conflict, civil population is currently attacked by all parties to the conflict : paramilitary groups, official security forces and guerrilla groups.

After the killing of two top leaders of the FARC, the governmental forces are increasing their attacks against the rebel group, in several regions of Colombia. Possibilities for peace talks remained behind, while enforced displacements are rising up all over the country as a consequence of the fighting. The military offensive is also putting in danger the FARC hostages' lives.

The Colombian society rejected the FARC violence, especially the taking of hostages through a worldwide and massive demonstration (4 February). Several members of the European Parliament joined the march in Bogota, a delegation of the European Parliament visited Colombia (3-8 February 2008). On 6 March, a similar initiative took place in more than 100 cities in Colombia and all over the world, in favor of the victims of crimes committed by paramilitary groups and state officials. A group of 17 Members of the European Parliament supported the initiative and asked for guarantees for the organizers' security. Mme Flautre and M. Lipietz, on behalf of the Subcommittee and the Delegation for relations with countries of the Andean Community, asked the Colombian authorities to provide security for the organizers of the march.

Nonetheless, in the days prior to the 6 March demonstration and in the days thereafter, several human rights defenders and trade unionists were assassinated. On March 13, many human rights defenders and organizations were threatened to death for their participation in the demonstration, by the newly called "New Generation" and "Black Eagles" paramilitary groups, especially those operating in Bogota.

As well as the neighborhood diplomatic relations and the hostages crisis, the situation of HR Defenders worsens when war prevails on dialogue, disregarding international law. They need international support and vigilance to continue their work.

The roundtable discussion will thus focus, among others, on the situation of human rights defenders and related issues, such as extrajudicial executions and displacements, the independence of the judiciary as well as the situation of the hostages.

### The Roundtable

At the meeting, an introduction will be provided by Emmanuel Raison, representative of ODH-ACO, International office for Human Rights - Action on Colombia, European network based in Brussels.

### The speakers will be :

- ▶ **Isabelle Heyer** is the Representative of *the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ)* before the United Nations

since September 2007. Prior to joining the CCJ, she worked during four years at the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) in Geneva as Programme Officer on Colombia and on counter-terrorism and human rights issues worldwide. The CCJ is a non-governmental organization with consultative status before the United Nations, which collects and analyzes information on human rights and humanitarian law, makes such information public, promotes the knowledge and use of the legal instruments that protect.

- ▶ **Claudia Erazo** from *Legal Corporation Yira Castro*, whose work is oriented towards assisting internally displaced persons and organizations in many regions of Colombia. As a lawyer, Claudia Erazo and her colleagues carry out human rights training sessions for leaders from internally displaced organizations, lodge legal actions to protect their rights, and represent families victim of enforced displacement in criminal, disciplinary, and administrative proceedings. For this work, the Corporation has been repetitively threatened by paramilitary groups, with especial intensity between June 2007 and January 2008. Its office was victim of an illegal search and information was stolen regarding land recovery cases. Eventually, one of Claudia Erazo's colleagues was forced to leave Colombia for a time, after receiving persistent personal threats.
- ▶ **Liliana Uribe** from the *Corporación Jurídica Libertad (Liberty Legal Corporation)*, an internationally respected non-profit legal services group specializing in human rights cases. The Medellín based non-governmental organization has developed its work in legal assistance for peasant, indigenous and afrodescendent communities and internally displaced persons, as well as investigation and human rights education. In October 2007, Mrs. Uribe co-ordinated an international observation mission on extrajudicial executions in Colombia, with the participation of 13 experts and human rights organizations from USA, UK, Germany, Spain and France. She also represents the victims of extrajudicial executions in Antioquia department, before the Interamerican Court for Human Rights.

### Venue :

European Parliament

ASP 1G2