

Press Bulletin

**CALL TO PAY HOMAGE TO THE VICTIMS OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY IN
COLOMBIA.**

February 24 in Gatineau and March 6 in Ottawa

Colombia is known for the smoothness its coffee and narcotics trafficking, but not for the bitter humanitarian drama that it currently suffers. Canadians do not know that almost four million poor farmers have been and are being violently removed from their lands. The voracious interest for land possession, which is causing the forced displacement, is supported by the war against insurgents and the business of bio-combustibles and narcotics. Big landowners and narco-paramilitaries, with the tolerance or participation of state agents, massacre, disappear and assassinate people with total impunity. Victims are often assassinated using power saws and dismembered alive. The political opposition, the defenders of human rights as well the journalists who denounce the facts are threatened, forced into exile and/or assassinated. The victims – men, women and children – are usually portrayed as helpers of the insurgency or as “guerrillas who have fallen in combat”. Others like us, members of the Ottawa - Gatineau section of the National Movement Against Crimes of State in Colombia, are forced to take refuge in countries like Canada to save our lives. This is the tropical version of the “fight against terrorism”, in the Colombia of “One hundred years of solitude”, a country that loses more of its ability to astonish as every day goes by.

On February 4, there was a march in Colombia rejecting the kidnappings and the crimes of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces Colombia), the most powerful guerrilla in the country. This march was started in the pages of Facebook and got the support of the government as well as the mass media. But the February 4 march had an evident bias, an obvious lack of ethics. It was an action to repudiate the crimes of only one of the armed actors. A mantle of forgetfulness was laid down on the countless crimes against humanity that have been committed with barbarian intensity by paramilitarism with the consent or complicity of state agents. The march also omitted the responsibility of the state in the countless violations to human rights and international human rights law.

We invite Canadians, Colombians, people from Latin-American origin and other nationalities to join us in the national and international homage to the victims of crimes against humanity in Colombia. We are joining thousands of people who will demonstrate worldwide on March 6, 2008 in solidarity with the victims of crimes against humanity in Colombia.

Section Ottawa-Gatineau

We want to manifest that

1- We reject all forms of crime against humanity. Colombia has gone through a massive and systematic violation of human rights by State agents and the paramilitary strategy. The commission of crimes against humanity has generated genocides, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, torture and forced displacement. At the same time, the insurgent groups have committed human rights infractions, with kidnapping being one of the more serious examples. This humanitarian crisis prevents the possibility of building a civilized society where respect for life and human dignity are the essential principles that underlie coexistence.

2- It is inadmissible to publicly justify these crimes either on the basis of ideological reasons of State under the pretense of national security, the “right” to self-defense, the accumulation of wealth and the despoliation of land or any other argument that is used to legitimize what is inhuman from an ethical point of view and when considering the right to life. We consider that all expression or speech that tries to ignore human rights and humanitarian law moves us away from the road to peace and democracy. Society must demand the respect for the right to truth, justice, integral reparations and guarantees of non-repetition.

3- We call for the respect of the victims and reject the manipulation of their suffering. We demand that victims not be used for political, electoral, economic or even military purposes. We call for the respect of the victims’ dignity, to stop any attempt to set them at odds against each other and to stop infringing on their rights when turning them into targets for new aggressions. We demand that victims’ proposals and arguments be taken seriously and with respect.

4- We call for the adoption of a humanitarian agreement that allows the return of the kidnapped to their families and communities. We demand respect for all attempts at facilitation, support and national and international observation, which contribute to these goals. We demand to avoid at all costs any type of combat operation that puts at risk the lives of kidnapped people or jeopardizes their integrity.

5- We demand truth, justice and reparations for all the victims of crimes against humanity and genocides. We demand that the disappeared people be returned to their families, that land be restored to the displaced. We demand that paramilitary groups be completely dissolved as well as their bonds to State instances, multinational companies and political parties. That all people tied to the para-politics responsible for human rights violations be judged and their crimes be brought to light before the country and the world.

6- After a long forty years of uninterrupted conflict it is urgent to find viable ways that allow us to advance without delay towards a negotiated political solution of the armed conflict, in which the rights of the victims are preserved. We reiterate our conviction that the war suffered in Colombia will only be overcome through a nation-wide, pluralist dialogue in concert with society.

7- We are joined today by the imperious need to bring the victims and Colombian society together in order to build a democratic society based on peace with social justice and the total respect for human rights and human dignity.

Adopted in Gatineau (Quebec), Sunday February 10, 2008.