

Press Release

Brussels, 30th of August 2018

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE DISAPPEARED: ODHACO DEMANDS FULL SUPPORT FOR THE UNIT FOR THE SEARCH FOR PERSONS HELD FOR DISAPPEARED

Today, on the 30th of August, are remembered the victims of enforced disappearance. In Colombia this day is of special meaning given the great number of direct and indirect victims of enforced disappearance in the country.

According to the National Centre for Remembrance of History, there were almost **83.000** persons disappeared in Colombia since 1958. Different state bodies use different numbers nevertheless. One of the most urgent problems therefore is the creation of a single and unified register of victims of enforced disappearance as an essential step to reduce the high rates of impunity of over 98 % in these cases.

In the Peace Accord between the Colombian government and the Farc-Ep signed in 2016, was agreed upon the creation of the Unit for the Search for Persons held for Disappeared (UBPD), part of the Integral System for Justice, Truth, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIJVRNR). The scale of the problem, the lack of response of the State and the inefficiency of existing state entities, brought victims to ask for the creation of this new unit.

Recently nevertheless, victim's organizations have expressed concern about delays in its implementation. The delays in the issuance of decrees necessary for its operation and changes made to the Special Jurisdiction of Peace by the President's party in Congress, raised doubts about the commitment of the former and new government to put into force the transitional justice system.

At the beginning of August, the decrees were issued, but it's necessary that the Ministry of Finance makes available the necessary financial resources for the UBPD. The total support of the new Government is needed so the UBPD can function, also on a local level in the different regions. Clarity is needed about mechanisms of participation prepared by the UBPD for the victims.

Taking into account these concerns and delays, we think international support for the UBPD and the other entities of the SIJVRNR is crucial to meet the rights of the victims of enforced disappearance and of other crimes related to the armed conflict. Oidhaco asks for the European Union to monitor and support politically and financially where possible the implementation of the fifth Chapter of the Peace Accord, about the Victims of the Armed Conflict.

More so because the practice of enforced disappearance has not ceased to exist. A recent case of enforced disappearance took place on 22nd of August in Puerto Rico – Meta, when **Jefferson Arevalo** was allegedly taken and disappeared by neoparamilitary groups. His body was found a couple of days later.

Oidhaco insists on the importance to bring truth and justice for the victims in these cases as a guarantee for non-repetition for them and other persons who are currently still at risk to be disappeared. Oidhaco is expecting the visit of Ms. Flor Hilda Hernández in October 2018 to Brussels, one of the *Mothers of Soacha*, who's sons were disappeared and subsequently victims of extrajudicial executions. She will participate in activities to bring over the message of the importance of the implementation of the Peace Agreements, in particular the issues about victim's right, to the different EU institutions in Brussels.

Oidhaco will as well be supporting the activities of the Commission for Elucidation of Truth, Community and Reconciliation in Europe.

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