

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

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Celebration of International Women's Day

We ask the EU to show responsibility towards women victims of war in Colombia

- Rape is used as a weapon of war in Colombia's armed conflict.
- According to the Colombian Constitutional Court, there is a direct link between displacement and sexual violence. The Court has ordered the Colombian government to take measures to protect women but so far nothing has been done.
- Oidhaco asks the Colombian government to invite to Colombia the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of violence against women and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on sexual violence in conflicts.
- Oidhaco also calls on the European Union to implement the EU Guidelines on Violence against Women.

Brussels, March 7, 2012. On the occasion of **International Women's Day**, **Oidhaco** calls upon the EU to show responsibility towards women victims of war in Colombia. Colombian women have become one of the most threatened and neglected groups in the Colombian conflict. Rape has been used by the armed actors in the conflict as a weapon of war. Both **Oidhaco** and Colombian human rights organisations are surprised by the absence of specific protection measures for these women and the silence of the Colombian government and the international community in response to this tragedy.

Women in any conflict are doubly vulnerable. The attacks on their bodies which are used as a territory of war, are usually silenced by both States and by the victims themselves, in the latter case, because of fear and shame. The perpetrators of these crimes use the fact that they can act with impunity, to terrorize women and communities. The situation in Colombia is truly dramatic. According to research by Oxfam, between 2001 and 2009, 489,687 women were direct victims of sexual violence, which means six women each hour. In March 2011, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called on the Attorney General's Office to "adopt a policy for the systematic investigation of cases of sexual violence and to quickly move forward in the investigation of alleged cases." However, most crimes continue to go unpunished and, as mentioned in the new report of the UN High Commissioner, in 2011 "only four cases were on trial out of the 183 that the Constitutional Court, in its Order 92 of 2008, instructed the Attorney General to investigate without delay."

On February 9, 2012, the Colombian Human Rights Ombudsman specifically condemned sexual violence against leaders of land restitution. Cleiner Almanza, leader of the organisation Displaced People from Montes de María, (*Población Desplazada de los Montes de María*) located in northern Colombia, publicly denounced that she had been the victim of rape, on January 29 in Bogotá. The Ombudsman also reported that Ana Angelica Bello, another leader from the land restitution program, warned that "of fifteen women who have the support of the Ombudsman's Office, four have been raped." She also denounced the fact that paramilitary groups "now prefer to rape women rather than killing them, to destroy their self esteem and to get them to withdraw from their struggle for land restitution."

Oidhaco asks the Colombian government to comply with United Nations recommendations relating to the rights of women and to invite to Colombia the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on sexual violence in conflicts. Moreover, Oidhaco spokesperson **Vincent Vallies**, reminds the EU that "a year ago we asked for public support for women victims of war in Colombia, yet so far we have not seen this happen. We remind the EU and its Member States that they are obliged to implement the EU guidelines on violence against women. "