

In five years at least 71 leaders claiming land restitution have been killed

We ask that the EU supports land resistance initiatives to help put a stop to displacement in Colombia

Colombia is the country with the highest number of displaced persons in the world. Five and a half million people have been driven from their lands

Brussels, April 17, 2012. April 17 marks the *International Day of Peasant Struggle*. In Colombia the rural population is faced with one of the worst humanitarian tragedies in the world. According to the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (*Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento* - Codhes), **during 2011 about 260,000 people were displaced in Colombia, more than 710 people a day**. The number of displaced persons in Colombia reached nearly 5.5 million in 2011. This vast number of war victims is composed mainly of peasant farmers, indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians.

"The value of land and territory is the main reason for this tragedy suffered by millions of Colombians. The pressure on these peoples' lands for areas of strategic control, agro-industrial projects, and mining areas, is alarming" notes Vincent Vallies, Oidhaco spokesperson. Some **0.4% of property owners in rural Colombia own 62.6% of the land**, while 86.3% of people own only 8.8%. In the midst of this situation, the resistance efforts of peasant farmers and of other sectors from Colombian society are numerous and varied. These initiatives include *Humanitarian Zones, Biodiversity Zones, Peasant Farmer Reserves, Peace Communities, Permanent Assemblies* and *Community "Mingas"*. All these initiatives seek to protect small farmers, indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians, allowing for the implementation of their own development models. "It is estimated that 70% of global food production comes from small farmers. In recognition of this reality, the world should show their support for and solidarity with the initiatives of rural populations in Colombia" suggests Vallies.

Oidhaco is deeply concerned about the individual and collective situation for rural victims in Colombia, which is worsening every day and shows no sign of improving. The *Law on victims and land restitution*, passed last year in Colombia, did not take victims into account during its drafting and adoption, nevertheless millions hope that their lands will be restored to them and their rights guaranteed. However, to date the Colombian State has failed to protect the leaders of the land restitution process, who struggle to represent their communities with no protection whatsoever. Those who took their lands through violent means, continue to sow terror in the Colombian countryside. In the past five years 71 leaders have been killed, 28 in 2011 alone. According to the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, only 60 of the 235 threatened leaders have been granted security measures; the remaining 175 are left completely unprotected.

"Our organization asks the EU to urgently make a public statement in solidarity with small farmers, indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians, to demand that Bogotá takes immediate action to protect the leaders who are involved in the process of land restitution, and to decisively support civil society land resistance initiatives: this support could help curtail the drama of displacement in Colombia," says Vallies.