

World Refugee Day

We ask the EU to break its silence on the million of Colombian displaced persons and refugees

Brussels, June 20, 2012. Today, June 20th, marks World Refugee Day. According to figures, Colombia is the 7th major source country of refugees in the world (**UNHCR**) and the country with the highest number of displaced people within its own territory (IDPs). In Colombia there are 5.5 million, according to figures from the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (*Consultoría para los DDHH y el Desplazamiento* - **Codhes**), and 3.9 million according to figures from the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation - *Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional* - two dramatic numbers. Colombia has been placed ahead of Sudan (5.2 million of IDPs according to the NGO IDCM), Afghanistan and Iraq in numbers of IDPs, but this drama has not been the subject of international alerts or global press coverage. The silence of the international community contributes to the fact that instead of the number of victims diminishing, it increases each year. In 2011 alone, according to Codhes, some 260,000 people were newly displaced. Every day in Colombia, 710 people become displaced. And as pointed out by the Colombian Constitutional Court (Auto 092, April 2008), there is a direct link between displacement and sexual violence; internally displaced women disproportionately suffer the impacts of armed conflict. According to the NGO Sisma Women (*Sisma Mujer*) in 2010 in Colombia there were 16,916 cases of sexual violence (that is 2 every hour).

These 5.5 million people have been displaced by armed conflict, by fear, by agro-industrial projects, by many things, millions of people forced to abandon their lands, their homes, their dreams of life. To these 5.5 million we must add all those who have had to seek refuge outside Colombia. The total Colombian refugee population in the Americas region, according to figures from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (**UNHCR**) is around 400,000 people. Most of them fled to neighbour countries: Venezuela (202,000) and Ecuador (122,600) (**UNHCR**). And even once they have left the country, some people have continued to be victims of further violations of their rights, as demonstrated by the DAS scandal in which illegal surveillance was revealed to have been carried out against Colombian refugees in Europe.

“The humanitarian and governance crisis which has meant that some 6 million people have been driven from their homes, deserves the immediate attention of the European Union”, says **Vincent Vallies**, Oidhaco spokesperson. The Colombian Constitutional Court itself, analyzing public policy on the displaced population, declared the existence of an unconstitutional situation in the country. “We regret that the European Parliament failed to include the Colombian displaced population in its last resolution, which called for the Colombian government to design an Action

Plan on human, labour and environmental rights. Why didn't they want to include displaced people in the resolution?"

Oidhaco asks the EU to "break the silence that it has so far maintained, on the humanitarian disaster represented by 6 million Colombian displaced people and refugees. We hope the EU shows solidarity with the victims of the conflict and that they demand that the Colombian government takes seriously the solution to this humanitarian crisis. We also call upon European and international solidarity movements to help solve the problem of refugees and IDPs, which remains invisible to the eyes of the world, but which causes daily suffering to millions of Colombians, including women and children, who are the main victims of this drama, of State abandonment and of the neglect of the international community".

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