

World Refugee Day and World Day against Torture

“Six million Colombian displaced persons and refugees continue to await public support from the EU”

Brussels, June 18, 2013. On Thursday, June 20, is the World Refugee Day and June 27 is the World Day against Torture, days that unfortunately remind us of the tragic reality in Colombia, which is taking place alongside the mainstream news reports about the current dialogue process in Havana between the Government of Santos and the FARC.

According to the Geneva-based *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*, **between 4.9 and 5.5 million Colombians are victims of internal displacement**, exceeding Syria by some two million people. The latest report by Colombian NGO *CODHES* estimates that in 2012 there were 256,000 newly displaced people; and in March 2013, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned about an increase in forced displacement in Colombia during the first quarter of 2013. The Office noted that in this period, taking into account only mass displacements of more than 50 people “*10,694 people were forcibly displaced. This represents an increase of 59 percent*”, compared to the first quarter of 2012. In 2011, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that there are some 400,000 Colombian refugees living in other countries.

Widespread impunity in relation to forced abandonment and dispossession of land is alarming. According to the Constitutional Court, **for every 200 cases, less than one reaches the prosecution stage, i.e. over 99.5% of cases remain unpunished**. In its November 2012 report, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) considered that there is a “*reasonable basis*” to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed by the actors in the armed conflict, including forced displacement. It thereby announced that one of the elements on which it will focus its preliminary examination on Colombia, will be legal proceedings related to forced displacement.

Faced with a situation of such magnitude, **the silence of the European Union is surprising**. “*The European Union and its representatives seem more willing to congratulate themselves for the ratification of the trade agreement with Colombia. To do this they undertake visits to Colombia in order to analyze opportunities for European companies. We do not see them being so proactive in publicly asking for real improvements to the grave situation in Colombia*” says Vincent Vallies, **Oidhaco** spokesperson.

This silence was compounded when Colombia refused to accept the recommendation made by more than 10 countries during the UN Universal Periodic Review in Geneva, that Colombia ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. “*What could justify the non-ratification of an international instrument that seeks to support countries in combating such a heinous crime as torture?*” asks **Oidhaco**.

“*The European Union cannot continue to be mere bystanders watching the progress of the dialogue between the government of President Santos and the FARC: they need to make visible the serious human rights situation in Colombia. The EU has a duty to condemn this situation and offer support to find a solution to these crimes and the impunity that surrounds them*” concludes the **Oidhaco** spokesperson.