

[PRESS RELEASE](#) Brussels, April 9, 2012

Ashton must press the EU to call for peace talks in Colombia

Brussels, April 9, 2012. To mark the National Day of victims of the conflict in Colombia, held today for the first time, we make an appeal to the European Union and the international community to contribute to the opening of peace talks in Colombia. There are millions of victims in Colombia, including those killed, displaced, disappeared, injured by landmines, raped, kidnapped, tortured, and exiled refugees. Most of these victims are civilians, including women, children and adolescents, who bear the brunt of the conflict even though they have never wielded a weapon. Colombia has lost more than fifty years to this war. We must stop the bleeding this country suffers, which every day further destroys its social fabric.

Oidhaco considers that the unilateral release of the last soldiers under the power of the FARC and the announcement by the guerrillas that they will no longer use kidnapping as a tactic of war, are a gesture on the road to peace. "We must seize this moment to talk about peace. We support civil society organisations in Colombia who have been asking for years for the war to stop and for an inclusive process of peace-building to begin. We call on both the Colombian government and guerrillas to recognize the need to end the armed conflict through dialogue, because each day that the war in Colombia continues, more Colombian people suffer the consequences" says **Vincent Vallies**, spokesperson for the Brussels-based organisation which represents more than 30 European organisations. "The release of these hostages was made possible through the efforts of Colombians for Peace, Piedad Cordoba and the International Group of Women Working for Peace. It is another example of the important role women play in building pathways to peace.

"As members of European civil society" continues **Vallies**, "we are asking Catherine Ashton to propose an initiative to support international peace talks in Colombia." **Oidhaco** is aware that the first steps must be made by the protagonists of the war in response to calls from Colombian society to end the suffering. "But we are also convinced that if the international community publicly declares itself in favour of opening up dialogue, this would mean support for victims and for the whole of Colombian society, showing that this war must come to an end," says **Vallies**.

For **Oidhaco** it is crucial that the good relationship between the EU and Colombia, reaches beyond the confines of trade and cooperation, to support an entire society that is a direct victim of decades of war. "The EU should call for peace in Colombia, and support a possible process which would include the participation of representatives of Colombian civil society to ensure lasting peace-building" closes **Vallies**. **Oidhaco** also urges the EU to call on all armed groups involved in the conflict to commit themselves to respect international humanitarian law as a starting point to begin to move towards peace.