

In the last ten years more than 400 lawyers have been murdered

Protests in Europe about the critical situation for lawyers in Colombia

Brussels, January 23, 2014. Tomorrow, on January 24, European lawyers' associations representing at least 10,000 lawyers will organise protests in various European cities about the danger their colleagues face in Colombia. According to figures from Colombia, in the last 10 years more than 700 lawyers have been murdered in this country and 4,400 have suffered different types of attacks. In the report from their last visit, the International Caravana of Jurists stresses that during all three missions they have organised to Colombia, delegates have heard about the high rate of impunity, which is still estimated at 97% for some crimes. The "International Day of the Endangered Lawyer", as the initiative is known, has been organised in Europe since 2010, in favour of lawyers from Iran, Turkey and the Basque Country. This year the day focuses on the protection of Colombian lawyers.

The protests will be held in Brussels in front of the Colombian Embassy, and in other major European cities such as Amsterdam, Berlin, Bern, The Hague, Madrid, Milan and Paris, among others. The organizers, the AED-EDL (European Association of Democratic Lawyers), the ELDH (European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights), the IDHAE (European Lawyers' Human Rights Institute), and the Human Rights Institute in Brussels are organizing these protests to call upon the Colombian government to take effective measures to protect lawyers and to ensure the free exercise of their profession.

Oidhaco is supporting this initiative because, during its 19 years of work promoting the defence of human rights with the institutions of the European Union and the United Nations Human Rights Council, it has witnessed this drama faced by those who work to defend the rights of all people in Colombia. *"Threatening or killing a lawyer silences the voices of many people who they work with. Unfortunately in Colombia people who defend the rights of others continue to be attacked. From January to September 2013, 52 human rights defenders were murdered in Colombia"*, says **Vincent Vallies**, **Oidhaco** spokesperson.

"Our organisation asks the EU to listen to more than 10,000 European colleagues of Colombian lawyers, by making public statements in support of the work of Colombian lawyers, and by calling upon the government of Juan Manuel Santos to protect the exercise of this profession in Colombia", states **Vallies**. *"If Colombia ignores threats against and killings of those who are dedicated to defending the rights of all Colombians, there can be no guarantees for the most basic and fundamental rights in the country"*, concludes the **Oidhaco** spokesperson.

