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In recent weeks, activists and defenders have been murdered and disappeared; thirteen defenders have been killed over the past three months.

“What else should happen in Colombia for the EU to publicly condemn this situation?”

- **Oidhaco calls on the EU to follow the example of the UK, who in its latest annual human rights report, made public its concern about human rights defenders in Colombia**

Brussels, May 10, 2012. In recent weeks, enforced disappearances, the killing of trade unionists, leaders claiming land, and human rights defenders, as well as the threats constantly received by organisations and defenders, are cause for extreme concern. In the first three months of 2012, thirteen human rights defenders have been killed; that is one each week. "These murders show that there are no guarantees for the work of defending human rights in Colombia. The EU, through Catherine Ashton, should urge the Colombian government to guarantee protection for activists and respect for social movements calling for peace," said **Vincent Vallies** spokesperson for **Oidhaco**.

On May 7, a threat was made by the *Bloque Capital* paramilitary group against a number of Colombian organisations. In it they announce their determination to eliminate the Patriotic March (*Marcha Patriótica*) social movement, a citizens' initiative calling for peace and a political solution to the armed conflict that Colombia is suffering. They accuse organisations of inciting "communities to demand their so-called rights to claiming lands" and of opposing "the well-deserved military jurisdiction of the heroes of our country".

These are serious threats. Recently two organizers of the Patriotic March, held on April 20 in Bogotá, were forcibly disappeared: Hernán Henry Díaz from the department of Putumayo and Marta Cecilia Guevara, community leader from the department of Caquetá. Furthermore, on April 27, Mao Enrique Rodríguez was killed in Bogotá. He was the bodyguard of a Communist Party leader who also participated in the march. It is extremely worrying to Oidhaco that on several occasions the authorities have smeared or questioned the Patriotic March. President Santos, for example, requested that the movement clarify their possible links with the FARC. These words spoken by the president increase the danger to members and participants of the movement.

In addition to these murders and disappearances, on Friday 27 April, Daniel Aguirre, Secretary General of *Sinalcorteros* – the trade union representing sugar cane cutters, was killed. Moreover, the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (*Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*) has denounced constant attacks and surveillance of its members without any response from the Colombian Government. This Commission accompanies land claims of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiando communities in Urabá, in the northwest of the country. Manuel Ruiz, killed in late March along with his 15 year old son, was a member of these communities. On May 5, a statement from the *Rastrojos- Comandos Urbanos* paramilitary group declared

that 25 organisations and 19 human rights defenders were military targets: "as we have already started to kill each of them without mercy we will not allow them to harm the policies of our president by making demands on the victims and land law."

"The EU knows about this situation. Therefore, we ask once again, that they speak out publicly about it and call upon the government of Juan Manuel Santos to demonstrate their commitment to human rights, with concrete actions" said **Vallies**. In the last annual report on human rights in the world issued by the UK, an EU Member State, presented on April 30 in London by the Foreign Office, this country laments 'the security situation for human rights defenders, which has if anything worsened' and denounces the increasing threats and violence from illegal armed groups, 'that go largely unpunished'. "This is an example that the EU should follow," says the Oidhaco spokesperson. We ask: "what else should happen in Colombia for the EU to publicly condemn this situation?". From the **Oidhaco** network we are asking for strong measures from the Colombian government to ensure full respect for human rights, and we demand that the parties in the armed conflict respect IHL. "That is why we are also calling on the FARC to promptly release French journalist Roméo Langlois," concludes **Vallies**.