

Colombian government has not fulfilled its promises to the UN Human Rights Council

September 19, 2013 – The International Office on Human Rights – Action on Colombia (Oidhaco), the Colombia-Europe-United States Coordination Group (CCEEU), Misereor, Kolko and the Colombian Commission of Jurists express their concern over the attitude of the Colombian authorities towards international bodies and mechanisms that monitor respect for human rights. In a country where disappearances, extrajudicial killings and forced displacement still occur, and where in the first semester of this year, 37 defenders were killed, our organizations consider that monitoring and access of victims to international mechanisms are highly necessary.

Indeed, today, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the report on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Colombia. Under this mechanism, a total of 160 recommendations were made to Colombia by States from five continents, expressing concern at the human rights situation in Colombia. However, Colombia rejected 26 of the recommendations, including the ratification of instruments that allow access of victims to international mechanisms, including recommendations on torture, the ratification of the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearance and on the protection of economic, social and cultural rights. Colombia also rejected the reference to the necessary comprehensive implementation of the recommendations made by the Office of the OHCHR in Colombia, which is troubling.

Moreover, although in the month of April, during the session of the UPR, the Colombian Vice - president announced a comprehensive renewal for three years of the mandate of the Office in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in August 2013 President Santos changed this position and declared that the mandate would be renewed for one year only. This not only questions the seriousness of the announcements made by the government to the Human Rights Council but also leaves the Office weakened against future pressures on its mandate. The Office of the OHCHR in Colombia has been key to monitoring and documentation of human rights violations in the country. The organisations and coordination groups mentioned above believe that the presence of the Office of the OHCHR in Colombia is also essential to allow international support for the peace process.

Equally, the steps taken by President Santos that aim to evade the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) are extremely worrying. President Santos announced that he would speak about the ICC during the United Nations General Assembly, after the Office of the ICC Prosecutor expressed doubts regarding the recent reforms, in particular the Legal Framework for Peace and the expansion of military criminal jurisdiction. The Colombian government's reaction is of particular concern, given that the mandate of the ICC only aims at ensuring that the most serious crimes, such as crimes against humanity and war crimes, do not remain unpunished.

Oidhaco and the CCEEU therefore insist on the importance that the international community remains vigilant on the situation in Colombia and request the fulfillment of the recommendations made by the various UN mechanisms. “For this monitoring, comprehensive renewal of the mandate of the Office of the OHCHR is key”, says Christiane Schwarz, President of Oidhaco, “and this should include the presentation of its annual report on the situation of Human Rights in Colombia before the UN Human Rights Council, a fundamental space for human rights monitoring throughout the planet”.

Note: The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council, applied to all UN member countries every four years. Colombia was examined under the UPR on April 23, 2013 and today the Human Rights Council has adopted the final report resulting from this examination. The Colombian government has not complied with most of the recommendations made by various UN mechanisms, including those made during the previous UPR (December 2008).