

Public Statement of the International Campaign on Women Human Rights Defenders

The International Campaign on Women Human Rights Defenders, and women human rights defenders from Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the Americas met in Bogota from 4 to 6 June 2008 to exchange experiences and further develop the mechanisms that provide protection for the work we are engaged in.

The work of women human rights defenders in Colombia and in the world, represents the possibility to transform the rights of women and of their communities into reality. As a direct consequence of their work, women human rights defenders are singled out and, in many cases, subjected to displacement, sexual violence, torture, assassination, and enforced disappearance. We all confront these same risks because we are women in societies where our work defies accepted norms and values.

During our stay in Colombia, we have learned that the Colombian Constitution recognises the defense of human rights is a right and a duty of every citizen. This right is also recognised by the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders of the United Nations and by the Guidelines of the European Union on Human Rights Defenders.

As members of the international community, States have an obligation to protect and guarantee the protection of women human rights defenders. In view of the above, we collectively submit this urgent appeal to the Colombian State to take serious measures to protect the lives and the work developed by Colombian women who defend human rights, especially peasant women, indigenous women and Afro-Colombian women, who face extremely vulnerable conditions. Such protection means that the Colombian Government should abstain from singling out women human rights defenders, which immediately places them in grave danger. We call on the government to guarantee that the valuable work of women human rights defenders can continue, because their work dignifies the women and their communities, and, by extension, the entire country.

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Bogota, June 6 - 2008