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## **Amnesty International Charges Colombian Government With "massive" Human Rights Violations**

*by John Neagle*

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Amnesty International has labeled the Colombian government as a "massive" human rights violator. On April 18 in Washington, Rona Weitz, Amnesty's Latin American program coordinator, told reporters that in Colombia, human rights violations were the result of a deliberate policy of political murder by the armed forces. Weitz said that the Amnesty International report on Colombia, a "human rights emergency," marked the beginning of a global campaign to put the country on the "human rights map." The continue is to continue until Dec. 10, the annual Human Rights Day established by the United Nations. In its report, Amnesty charged the Colombian government with hundreds of killings and disappearances in recent years. The report says, "It can only be concluded that human rights violations on a massive scale are not merely tolerated within the Colombian armed forces, but are in fact the result of a deliberate policy of political murder." Senator Pedro Alcantara, a member of Colombia's Union Patriotica (UP), who appeared with Weitz, said he supported Amnesty's findings. The human rights organization has also charged that the UP has been a principal target of violations by the Colombian security forces. (The UP is a leftist party founded by former guerrillas.) According to Weitz, the Colombian security forces "act with impunity," and their actions are "sanctioned at the highest levels." She claimed that the Colombian government's denial of support for death squads has been proven inaccurate: "Our evidence shows the government has involvement." Amnesty presented a list of 20 names of persons who had either been disappeared or been the victims of "extrajudicial execution." Among those listed were doctors, mayors, and a UP senator from Medellin who was murdered shortly after he led a demonstration protesting a wave of killings in that city. (An "extrajudicial killing" is an execution that occurs outside the provisions of the law, whether by government officials or private individuals.) Alcantara said Washington has overemphasized the drug issue, while simultaneously ignoring the economic hardships faced by Colombian peasants. He declared that the "great landowners" in Colombia continue to inhibit progress. The landowners, he said, will not yield "to the needs of the people," and are willing to kill persons they cannot control. He added, "The only thing that worries the great landowners is land reform." The US, said Alcantara, has "forgotten" about human rights in Colombia. State Department human rights reports on Colombia, he added, are "very vague and very erroneous." The senator described the Colombian situation as "extremely critical." He claimed that certain elements within the armed forces were "linked to the drug trade." Although the drug problem is serious, he said, the mass media's presentation of Colombia "as a society of drug traffickers" was simply unacceptable. [Notes on recent violence: At an Easter celebration in the village of La Mejor Esquina (near Buenavista, Cordoba province, about 250 miles northwest of Bogota), 10 hooded gunmen clad in uniforms similar to those used by the Army fired on about 500 peasants, resulting in at least 12 deaths, and scores of wounded. On the evening of April 14, President Virgilio Barco announced the appointment of a military governor, Maj. Gen. Fernando Gomez Barros, to Antioquia department. The appointment was the result of declaring the department's banana-producing region, Uraba, an "emergency zone." In the past year, dozens of people in the Uraba area have been murdered by paramilitary groups, including

agricultural workers, union activists, and attorneys, among others. Gomez is to work alongside the civilian governor of the department, Fernando Panesso Serna. The most recent massacre in the region occurred on April 11, when rightwing gunmen killed 25 peasants in the town of Coquitos, Turbo municipality. On April 18, government officials in Medellin announced that special security measures had been imposed in the central and southern regions of Antioquia department. According to officials, seven separate US business affiliates and other US concerns were the targets of dynamite explosions on the evening of April 17. Local police said the bombings caused three minor casualties, and a "large amount" of material damage. A group calling itself the "People's Militia" claimed responsibility for the bombings, in protest of US intervention in Central America. Among the targets were Goodyear, Texas Instruments, a gymnastic recreation center, and a Hare Krishna yoga center.] (Basic data from several sources, including AP, AFP, 04/04/88; Prensa Latina, 04/15/88; 04/18/88)

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