

May 8th, 2007**Open letter to President elect Nicolas Sarkozy**

Dear Mr President,

Today, 8th May, the anniversary of the Liberation of France is the 1900th day that Ingrid Betancourt, the French-Colombian deputy and senator has spent as a hostage in Colombia.

Like you, Mr President, she was a candidate in the presidential elections in her country five years ago. But the deep-rooted violence and the humanitarian tragedy that has affected Colombia for several decades had a different outcome; today she has been held hostage by FARC for more than 5 years. Her family has not had any news of her since May 2003.

You mentioned Ingrid's name publicly during your first speech as the newly elected President and we wish to thank you.

Her liberation, like that of Clara Rojas and the other political hostages whose fate is inextricably linked, can only come about through a non-violent and negotiated settlement. A military rescue such as has been planned by some military personnel close to president Uribe has been unanimously rejected by the families of the hostages – in particular by Ingrid's family. FARC have warned on several occasions that they would not hesitate to kill their prisoners in the event of a rescue attempt. They have done so on several occasions as happened in May 2003: when the army had attempted to free a dozen hostages they found only bodies.

The deep-rooted violence and the Colombian humanitarian tragedy have political as well as economic origins. Responsibility for this lies both with rebel forces and paramilitaries, the later having carried out some terrible acts of violence. Such a situation has been condemned regularly by the Secretariat of the UNHCR, the International Labour Organisation and the major NGO's defending Human Rights (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Federation for the Rights of Man).

The kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt has given the citizens of this country an opportunity to become aware of the complexity of the situation, and the ongoing struggle, on a daily basis, of the families of those held hostage, as well as the work of the many human rights defenders, journalists, trade-unionists, educators and citizens.

Since the day of Ingrid Betancourt's kidnapping, the FICIB has supported her family and all the other families of those held hostage. In so doing, it wishes to express its full support for all the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia who are currently forgotten; those who have been displaced, disappeared, murdered, tortured, human beings reduced to pawns in a many-sided conflict.

France can play a key role, not only in the liberation of Ingrid Betancourt but also in the working out of a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Colombian conflict.

We would like to thank you for the initiatives that you will undertake on behalf of France, in this regard.

Yours sincerely