

Against every-day barbarism

We, progressist intellectuals and citizens, committed to democracy and social justice; we, who are strongly involved in the emergence of societies emancipated from all forms of violence and who defend the right of peoples to build alternatives to the dangers of untamed capitalism; we, who love Colombia, have friends there, have lived there or who only know it from a distance, we want to express our pain and shame as we witness the fate of the kidnapped victims and, through them, the extent of the human tragedy affecting Colombia. Such a tragedy is strangling the civil population and is trampling on the basic principles of human dignity. Therefore:

1. We express our strongest possible condemnation of the practice of kidnapping, as carried out by the FARC, other guerrilla organisations, paramilitary groups, certain members of public armed forces, as well as ordinary transgressions of common law. Kidnapping is, of itself, an atrocious crime, which leads to physical exhaustion and the social death of the victims. Moreover, it exposes the kidnapped to the direct threat of physical death, due to unhygienic conditions or intensification of the conflict. Nothing, absolutely nothing can possibly justify it. The same applies to all blackmail pressure (terrorist attacks, threats, assassinations, massacres) exerted against civil society, by illegal armed groups or certain policemen and soldiers, whose military strategies have perverted their initial political and ethical purpose.
2. With identical firmness, we also condemn the irresponsible and unacceptable attitude of the Colombian government. The present government refuses to recognise the existence of the armed conflict and to apply the principles of international humanitarian law. It puts unbearable pressure over the hostages' families, by regularly invoking the possibility of military action. It insults the members of the democratic opposition, which it sets up as potential or real targets for the paramilitary groups. Such groups are known to have relationships with drug traffickers and the political leadership, within a context where justice is impossible to enact. In fact, civil demands for public truth, complete reparation and non-reoccurrence of atrocities constantly face a political vacuum. Finally, the deployment of "democratic security" policy appears as a failure: it is not capable to protect the most vulnerables, while it tries to legitimate its activities behind the fallacious justification of a "war against terrorism". All these elements reveal the immense responsibility beard by the current government, and call for commensurate condemnation.
3. We condemn the policies of some members of the international community, particularly those of the United States' government. With its « Columbia », « Patriot » and « Consolidation » Plans, the later gives the Colombian regime the logistical and financial means to wage an atrocious war. For its part, the European Union is constantly hiding from the disastrous humanitarian reality, behind the façade of 'economic interests'. This was clearly visible at the recent negotiations with the Andean Community. However, this reality persists stubbornly, as witnessed by the reports of the Commission on Human Rights of the UN over many years, regarding the situation in Colombia. Is it really necessary to remind ourselves that Colombia has over 3,000 kidnapped victims (with a little less than one third being held by the FARC¹), 30.000 victims of 'forced

¹ Source: Las Voces del Secuestro

disappearance² (essentially by the action of paramilitary groups) and 3.9 million displaced persons³ ? Do we need reminding of the fact that this country, together with Sudan, has the greatest number of displaced persons in the world, that 60% of the population lives below the level of poverty and that the country is subjected to intolerable social and cultural injustice?

This is why we demand immediate action from all the democratic voices throughout Colombia, South America, the European Union and the United States that can contribute to the saving of the hostages and the implementation of the humanitarian agreement. These are the necessary steps toward a non violent and negotiated solution to this conflict. What we officially demand:

1. The FARC should immediately free, unconditionally, all civil hostages in their possession, whether they be economic or political hostages. It should be clear that the latter cannot be exchanged against any form of ransom and are not concerned by a possible humanitarian agreement. Faced with the extreme suffering of the families, the FARC must prove their willingness to take political responsibility and look for basic ethical coherence. They have to demonstrate their ability to create the conditions for a resolution of the crisis. Without such a perspective, their struggle is a non-sense. If it were foreseen that this gesture be a counterparty to the humanitarian agreement, it might also be carried out in anticipation. The recent videos and letters of political hostages are a desperate appeal for measures to be taken with no more delay. As a matter of fact, this demand is equally valid for all those responsible for kidnapping.
2. The government should display the same kind of responsible attitude. Hence, it should definitively abandon the hypothesis of liberating the hostages with the use of the military force. It should establish the basis for a humanitarian agreement to allow an exchange of prisoners (imprisoned guerrilla fighters against military and police personnel being held as hostages). The legal and moral logic of such an agreement should be underlined: within the framework of international law, it aims to regulate peacefully the exchange of prisoners in time of war. Thus, it inserts the logic of non-violence into a situation which is structurally violent. In this spirit, none of the available perspectives should be neglected, on condition, however, that the negotiations undertaken to free the hostages are not indefinitely used as disguised ways to continue the conflict.
3. The international community should demonstrate its firm commitment to the advancement of peace and human rights in Colombia, scene of the largest humanitarian tragedy on the South-American continent since the Second World War. Three specific demands are on the agenda: the maintenance of the UN office in situ and an increase in its scope of activities; the dispatching of a permanent representative of the European Union which will reinforce the impact of European diplomacy with regard to the humanitarian agreement; the development of mechanisms to force the Colombian government to guarantee that the judicial actions initiated by NGO's to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights will continue without obstruction. Moreover, these elements are to be considered as the first steps in a process of reconstruction of a completely independent judiciary system. Such a system will have to be capable of putting an end to the crimes committed by the parties to the conflict and to respond to the

² The disappeared are people brutally torn from their normal lives, often tortured and whose bodies are never returned to their families. Erased from society from one day to the other, they suffer a double denial: from the authorities in power who deny the reality and also from international public opinion, which is not aware of it.
Source : FIDH

³ Over the last five years of implementation of the "democratic security" policy, the number of forced displaced persons reached 1.174.396. Source: Codhes.

demand of the victim associations, to have recognition of an inalienable right to the truth, to reparation and to the non-reoccurrence of atrocities. Beyond this, it is up to the Colombian citizens to draw up the political lines which will allow them to renew with social justice and to reject the various forms of violence which occur on their territory.

Amongst the most recent evidence proving that hostages are still alive was one bit that drew particular attention. It was the message addressed by Ingrid Betancourt to her mother. It is deeply moving through its blend of intimacy and universality, exhaustion and moral resistance. The words it contains are like hyphens between anonymous victims and the rest of the world. Ingrid quotes Albert Camus. The best way to echo her is to continue reading the author of *L'Etranger*: "Totalitarian tyranny is not built on the qualities of the totalitarians but rather, on the shortcomings of the free" (A. Camus, *Actuelles I*). In Colombia, the faces of the hostages, as well as those of victims of other unacceptable crimes, are the reverse image of our barriers to action. It is desperately urgent that we reverse the tide of events, if the notion of humanity is to keep a meaning for us.