

Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton  
Department of State  
Washington DC 20520



September 21, 2011

Dear Secretary Clinton,

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of the US Government to encourage the international community to recognize women's rights as human rights. The meetings you convene with local women's groups when you travel overseas coupled with the creation of the Office for Global Women's Issues and the Obama Administration's appointment of a women's human rights champion to lead the office are important steps that will surely contribute to the advancement of human rights not only for women and girls, but for all people. We additionally thank you for your commitment and leadership on CEDAW ratification and continued efforts to end violence against women and girls across the globe.

We would like to call your attention to the report, *This Is What We Demand. Justice! Impunity for Sexual Violence Against Women in Colombia's Armed Conflict*, which Amnesty International (AI) released today. The report details the failure of the Colombian authorities to address the lack of justice for women and girl survivors of the country's long-running armed conflict. Millions of women, men and children have been forcibly displaced, unlawfully killed, tortured, raped, taken captive or been the victims of enforced disappearances during Colombia's 45-year-long conflict. Women, and especially indigenous and Afro-descendant women, have been subjected to multiple abuses, and crimes against them are widely underreported and investigated. In 2010, the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science carried out 20,142 examinations into suspected cases of sexual violence in Colombia, compared to 12,732 in 2000. These are only the reported cases. Given the strong partnership the US has developed with Colombia, Amnesty International urges the US to make the issue of conflict-related sexual violence against women in Colombia the top priority in the next High-Level Partnership Dialogue (HLPD) the two countries will convene.

In the context of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, sexual violence can constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. As such, acts of conflict-related sexual violence must be investigated and prosecuted as crimes under international law and not as ordinary crimes. However, in Colombia many such crimes are never investigated at all and impunity rates are very high. In 2008, the Colombian Constitutional Court ordered the Attorney General to Investigate 183 crimes of sexual violence against forcibly displaced women, 19.4% of which implicate Colombian security forces. However, apart from these investigations, there are only 68 other cases of conflict-related sexual violence under investigation despite high numbers of incidence.

Included in AI's report are a set of recommendations to the Colombian Government, the guerilla organizations, other governments, and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The concrete and practical measures, outlined in the report, which the Colombian Government can and should adopt -- and the international community must support-- would greatly contribute to combating impunity in cases of conflict-related sexual violence. Given the partnership between the US and Colombia, which has been highlighted during the HLPD between the two countries, Amnesty International additionally calls on the US to closely monitor the efforts of the Colombian Government to fully implement the recommendations contained in AI's report as well as human rights recommendations made by the United Nations (UN) and the Inter-American human rights system.

To date the HLPD has provided promising rhetoric, but we have yet to see concrete actions as a result of the dialogue—including *actions* to address human rights issues that representatives from both governments state are a priority. A step in the right direction—which would be in line with public commitments made by both Obama and Santos Administration officials—would be to discuss at the next HLDP the issue of sexual violence in Colombia and the mechanisms that should be put in place to protect those at the forefront of the struggle for justice. This discussion should cover the development and implementation of an action plan to end sexual violence in Colombia—including measures to combat discrimination against women and girls and to put a stop to the impunity which ensures that those responsible for such crimes are brought to justice. Additionally, it should include a discussion regarding progress or lack of progress made by the Colombian government to fully implement UN and Inter-American and other intergovernmental bodies' recommendations, including recommendations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.

Again, we thank you for your work to combat violence against women globally, and we look forward to continued leadership from the US on the issue.

Sincerely,



Larry Cox  
Executive Director, Amnesty International USA

CC: Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Melanne Vermeer