

That Seanad Éireann:

- expressing its outrage at the kidnapping and detention for political ends of hostages, held by illegal armed groups in Colombia, including in 2002 that of Ms Ingrid Betancourt, a former member of the National Senate of Colombia and a candidate for the Presidency of Colombia;
- appalled by the written and photographic evidence recently recovered by the Government of Colombia that portray the inhuman conditions in which Ms Betancourt is being held;
- recalling further that Ms Betancourt has dual French-Colombian citizenship and is therefore also a citizen of Europe;
- regretting that in the last two years, proposals made to facilitate a humanitarian exchange resulting in a release of all hostages held by illegal armed groups, including efforts by the governments of France, Spain and Switzerland have not been successful to date;
- noting the renewed efforts made by the President of France with the full support and encouragement of all the Member States of the European Union;
- noting also efforts at intermediation made by the President of Venezuela, which were acknowledged in the Council Conclusions on Colombia of 19 November 2007, and further recent offers of intermediation made by the Presidents of Argentina and Brazil;
- welcomes the recent offer of the Colombian Government to create a 'zone of encounter' for a humanitarian agreement and the offer of the Episcopal Conference of Colombia to act as mediators in securing the release of the hostages;
- calls upon the illegal armed groups in Colombia to release all hostages without delay and on all involved parties to demonstrate the necessary political will to bring an end to this brutal affront to human rights and dignity; and
- continues to support the Government of Colombia in its search for a negotiated solution to the internal armed conflict, including through direct engagement with those illegal armed groups which may be prepared to negotiate, and to bring lasting peace to Colombia.

December 20th, 2007