



Three years without Ingrid Betancourt !

On 23 February 2005, Ingrid Betancourt and her associate Clara Rojas will start their fourth year as hostages in the hands of FARC in Colombia.

For Ingrid and Clara, for more than 3000 hostages, for civilian and military, for men and women, for elderly people and up to 400 children who languish in the jungle at the mercy of their torturers, hopes of an imminent release have never seemed so remote.

Held somewhere in the insalubrious regions of the Amazon jungle, without any contact at all with their families, they try to survive in living conditions that are extremely debilitating. If they are freed one day, those who survive will probably remain affected by their experiences forever.

What to condemn first?

The cruelty of their abductors, who continue without qualms of conscience, to carry out planned kidnappings and to kill civilians as a 'normal' way of pursuing a fight that they would have us believe, is a fight for freedom?

The indifference of the Colombian government who cold bloodedly allow thousands of its citizens endure this agony - some for more than seven years-, and whose chief concern seems to be the glory of a hypothetical military victory?

The trivialisation of this situation by the general public, especially in Colombia, where a significant part of the population appear to rank kidnappings in a category " trials of everyday life"?

Or the unbelievable naivety of some groups and political organisations in our countries that continue to support the Colombian guerrilla groups in the name of their so-called Marxists convictions?

To the risks run by the hostages, add tropical diseases, violence of their torturers, random bombings by the Colombian army, helped by the USA under the Patriot Plan and, even worse, the overwhelming feeling of despair. Months and years go by without anyone, apart from their relatives, seeming to be bothered by their fate.

The clear and consistent message given to us by their families is this: they are broken hearted by the indifference of their government: they are terrified by the militarist policies of their president and the effect these will have on the life of the hostages: they ask us to send this message loud and clear:

" Our only hope, now, is pressure from the countries of Europe on our government and on the guerrilla groups"

Now members of the International Federation of Ingrid Betancourt Committees, the support committees of France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Ireland and other countries continue tirelessly their struggle. They have decided to speak out on behalf of all these families by sending, in the weeks to come, an SOS to local, national and European elected representatives.

As we sadly mark the third anniversary of hostages Ingrid Betancourt and Clara Rojas, we ask all elected representatives and members of the media who have always supported us to continue to do so. We ask them to increase their efforts to convince the parties in Colombia to seek and find a peaceful solution as a priority.

Allowing the problem to fester or pretending to solve it through violence is totally unacceptable. A humanitarian agreement, the first step towards the release of all the hostages, is the only acceptable alternative.

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