

**Catherine Ashton**  
High Representative of the Union  
for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**European Institutions Office**

Brussels, 7 December 2012

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Dear Baroness Ashton,

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE AMERICAS**

Ahead of International Human Rights Defenders Day, I attach a link to our new report, [Transforming pain into hope: Human rights defenders \(HRDs\) in the Americas](#). This highlights the enormous progress HRDs have helped achieve, and the dangers they continue to face.

Despite the recognition international and regional institutions, and some national authorities, give HRDs, they are still targeted, even where specific protection mechanisms and programmes exist. They have been facing escalating intimidation, harassment and attacks by state security forces, paramilitary groups and organised crime. They have been vilified in the press and subjected to unfounded charges, unfair trials and miscarriages of justice. The aims of their detractors and attackers are clear: silence them, prevent them from performing their legitimate work and silence the voices of victims and survivors who seek justice.

There have been advances in some key human rights violation cases, but widespread impunity remains a serious concern. Out of the almost 300 cases analysed for this report in more than a dozen countries, those directly responsible were convicted in just four. Almost half the cases involved land disputes. Several, including in Brazil, Colombia and Honduras, were associated with major development projects led by private companies. None of the companies or their staff has been found guilty of any criminal or civil offence in connection with these attacks on HRDs.

Certain groups of HRDs are at particular risk of attack. Their human rights work relates to land and natural resources; the rights of women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender and intersex people; as well as migrants' rights. Journalists, bloggers, those seeking to halt impunity for human rights violations, and trade unionists who defend human rights are also at particular risk.

In line with the EU Guidelines on HRDs we ask the EU to continue playing a key role in promoting recognition and protection of HRDs by maintaining regular contact with them; raising their cases with state authorities through démarches and in political and human rights dialogue; providing visible recognition and support to HRDs and attending and observing trials where appropriate. We also encourage the EU to ask states in the Americas to comply with their international human rights obligations and:

- Halt and fully investigate attacks, violence and other abuse against HRDs by state and non-state actors; recognise their work's legitimacy and relevance
- Do all necessary to ensure that HRDs can freely pursue their legitimate human rights work, including preventing and stopping criminal or other accusations against HRDs made because of their human rights work
- Take and implement effectively all necessary steps to protect HRDs at imminent risk of attack and ensure that a gender perspective is integrated into any protection or investigation mechanism

I look forward to your response and would be pleased to provide any further information you might require.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Nicolas J Beger  
Director

CC:

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