

PRESS RELEASE

27th February 2008

Bacik Welcomes Imminent Release of Colombian Hostages

Senator Ivana Bacik today welcomed the breaking news of the imminent release of four hostages held in Colombia by the FARC.

'For those of us who have campaigned for the release of hostages held by FARC, today's news represents a significant breakthrough. This is the second hostage release this year, and there is now a growing hope that other hostages held by the FARC, and other paramilitary organisations in Colombia, may be released soon.'

'Our European partners, especially France, have played an important role in encouraging progress on this important human rights issue and I would urge the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dermot Ahern, to do all in his power to support these efforts at national and EU level to ensure that the significant advances achieved in recent weeks are continued.'

'It is also important to acknowledge the critical role that Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez, has played in negotiating the releases of hostages. This initiative has produced real results and we must support the ongoing engagement of Venezuela in brokering the hostage releases.'

'I have raised this issue, particularly the continuing detention of Colombian Presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt, in the Seanad, and as a result of my work my colleagues in the Seanad last term agreed to an all-Party motion urging the release of hostages.'

'Ms. Betancourt is a campaigner, she is a passionate advocate for environmental and social justice, what is more, she is a democrat. It is important that elected representatives stand shoulder to shoulder with our democratic colleagues throughout the world who rights have been trodden underfoot by autocratic regimes or organisations. The release of Ms. Betancourt, and all those held by the FARC, is an important human rights issue and today's release of hostages must be followed through until all those detained against their will gain their freedom.'

Ends.

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