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Tenth anniversary of the Convention of Belém do Pará: Time for action!

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Joint Declaration by Amnesty International and the undersigned organizations.

On the eve of the tenth anniversary of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women "Convention of Belém do Pará" -- the only international treaty in the world specifically on violence against women -- Amnesty International and the undersigned organizations are making an urgent appeal to all member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) with regard to the situation of women in the American continent.

In spite of the fact that the "Convention of Belém do Pará" has received more ratifications than any other treaty on human rights in the hemisphere, we would draw particular attention to the fact that acts of violence against women are serious violations of Human Rights which are far from having been eradicated.

Thousands of women in the region encounter gender-related violence in their daily lives. In the context of armed conflict, women who are fleeing for their lives, refugees and displaced persons, frequently suffer abuse at the hands of the security forces, border guards, smugglers, armed groups and other social actors. In many cases, women and girls who have been recruited as soldiers suffer violence and sexual abuse, even within their own armed groups. In addition, hundreds of women in post armed conflict situations suffer horrendous experiences and never receive proper care.

In the home and in daily life, in times of "peace", violence against women in the region is also a cause for great concern. It is a daily occurrence that women of the hemisphere are victims of different types of violence at the hands of their partners or family members, their employers or other actors, or even of institutionalized violence. A number of studies carried out in recent years have found, for instance, that in some countries in the region as many as 70% of women have suffered some form of gender-based violence. What is more, up to 2003, an average of around 80% of states in the Continent had not outlawed sexual abuse within marriage.¹

Similarly, women who raise their voices in favour of the recognition of fundamental rights, the Human Rights Defenders, often have to deal with harassment.

It is often the case that such acts go unpunished. It is not unusual for states to fail to carry out impartial and effective investigations into abuses committed by their own employees. Unfortunately, it is also not unusual that when the perpetrators of such acts of violence are individuals, the "due diligence" required by the Convention of Belém do Pará is absent, and there is a failure to take reasonable steps to investigate and identify those responsible and impose the appropriate sanctions. This is an abuse of fundamental rights, the full magnitude of which is still not clear. This lack of access to justice for women who are victims of violence is thus a shameful reality in the region.

We should not forget that the Inter-American Human Rights System is playing an important role in a context such as the one described. The system has proposed action with regard to the determination of specific obligations for states on the elimination of acts of violence against women; in this respect, the analyses, recommendations and decisions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its Report on Women's Rights, and the various decisions of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights are significant. However, such efforts on the part of the supervisory bodies mentioned will never be sufficient to change the situation unless the states parties clearly embrace the commitments laid down in the "Convention of Belém do Pará", adopting, among other measures, standards compatible with that instrument and developing policies to promote a culture which is conducive to the eradication of all forms of violence against women.

If the signatories to the Convention of Belém do Pará are seriously committed to promoting and protecting women's rights, it is time to act. As the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention of Belém do Pará draws near, they should delay no more in implementing specific measures to help stamp out violence against women in America in their daily lives once and for all.

Amnesty International

Asociación Estoreña Para el Desarrollo Integral (AEPDI), Guatemala

Asociación Latinoamericana para los Derechos Humanos (ALDHU), Ecuador

Auditoría Democrática Andina, Ecuador

Center for Reproductive Rights

Centro de Derechos Económicos y Sociales (CDES), Ecuador

Centro de Derechos Humanos "Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez" A.C. (Centro Prodh), México

Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, México

Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo S.J." (CSMM), Ecuador

Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS), Argentina

Centro de Planificación y Estudios Sociales (CEPLAES), Ecuador

Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (CEJIL)

CHUQUIRAGUA, Ecuador

COFAVIC, Venezuela

Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, México

Comisión por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (CDDH) Ecuador, Ecuador

Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (CLADEM)

Comité de Solidaridad con los Pueblos de Ecuador, España

Comité de Solidaridad con los Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina, España

Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos del Peru, Peru

Asociación Civil Citaq (CITAQ)

Asociación de Defensa Legal y Promoción Social (ADLps)

Asociación de Familias Desplazadas de Lima (ASFADDEL)

Asociación Jurídica Pro Dignidad Huamana de Huánuco (AJUPRODH)

Asociación Ministerio Diaconal Paz y Esperanza (PAZ Y ESPERANZA)

Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Secuestrados, Detenidos y Desaparecidos (ANFASEP)

Asociación por la Vida y la Dignidad Humana (APORVIDHA)

Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos (APRODEH)

Asociación Servicios Educativos Rurales (SER)

Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica (CAAAP)

Centro de Asesoría Laboral del Perú (CEDAL)

Centro de Atención Psicosocial (CAPS)

Centro de Desarrollo Humano (CEDEH)

Centro de Estudios y Acción para la Paz (CEAPAZ)

Centro de Iniciativas para el Desarrollo Humano (CEIDHU)

Centro para el Desarrollo Humano (CDH)

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Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Ica (CODEH - ICA)

Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad (CDHVS)

Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Pucallpa (CODEH - PUCALLPA)

Comisión de Justicia Social de Chimbote (CJS - CHIMBOTE)

Comisión de Justicia y Paz DDHH del Vicariato Apostólico de Iquitos (VICARIATO APOSTOLICO DE IQUITOS)

Comisión de Solidaridad, Desarrollo y Justicia (COSDEJ)

Comisión Diocesana de Pastoral Social - Cajamarca

Comisión Diocesana de Servicio Pastoral Social (CODISPAS HUARAZ)

Comisión Prelatural de Pastoral Social - Huamachuco (COPREPAS)

Comité de Defensa de Derechos Humanos Taurija (CDDHT)

Comité de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de la Diócesis de Huacho (CODEH - HUACHO)

Comité de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de la Prov. de Sánchez Carrión (CODEH – SC)

Comité de Derechos Humanos de Canas (CODEH - CANAS)

Comité de Derechos Humanos de Chumbivilcas (CODEH - CHUMBIVILCAS)

Comité de Derechos Humanos de Espinar (CODEH - ESPINAR)

Comité de Derechos Humanos de Ilo (CODEH - ILO)

Comité de Derechos Humanos de Moyobamba (CODEH - MOYOBAMBA)

Comité de Derechos Humanos de Pachitea (CODEH - PACHITEA)

Comité de Derechos Humanos de Tayabamba - Pataz (CODEH - TAYABAMBA)

Comité de Derechos Humanos del Distrito del Putumayo (CODHP)

Comité de Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo Humano - Pasco (CODEH - PASCO)

Comité de Familiares de Detenidos, Desaparecidos y Refugiados (COFADER)

Concilio Nacional Evangélico del Perú (CONEP)

Diócesis de Chulucanas Area de Justicia y Paz (DIOCESIS DE CHULUCANAS)

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Fundación Ecuménica para el Desarrollo y la Paz (FEDEPAZ)

Grupo de Iniciativa Nacional por los Derechos del Niño (GIN)

Instituto de Defensa Legal (IDL)

Instituto Peruano de Educación en Derechos Humanos y la Paz (IPEDEHP)

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Vicaría de Solidaridad de la Prelatura de Juli (VICARIA DE SOLIDARIDAD DE JULI)

Vicaría Solidaridad de la Prelatura de Sicuani

Vicariato Apostólico San José del Amazonas

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Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación de la Compañía de Jesús en Honduras (ERIC), Honduras

Federación Internacional de los Derechos Humanos (FIDH)

Fundación CEPAM- Guayaquil, Ecuador

Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho, El Salvador

Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer "Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera" (CEMUJER), El Salvador

Justiça Global, Brasil

Movimiento Nacional de Derechos Humanos (MNDH) de Brasil, Brasil

Núcleo de Estudos Negros (NEN), Brasil

Plataforma contra el ALCA, España

Plataforma Peruana de DDHH, Democracia y Desarrollo, Peru

Programa Andino Derechos Humanos y Democracia Plan País Ecuador, Ecuador

Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos (Provea), Venezuela

Reforma Penal Internacional

Rights & Democracy, Canada

SERPAJ

1 Cfr. PNUD, Proyecto Regional RLA/97/014 *Informes Nacionales sobre la Situación de la Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres, marzo 1999*, p.9. UNIFEM, *Not a Minute More: Ending Violence against Women*, New York, 2003, p. 93-94.

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