

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 37/008/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 213
6 September 2004

Embargo Date: 6 September 2004 00:01 GMT

Honduras: Two years on and killing of children continues

Despite the creation of the Special Unit for the Investigation of Violent Deaths of Children two years ago, the killers of children in Honduras continue to get away with murder, said Amnesty International today, as it relaunched its world-wide campaign calling on the Honduran government to stop impunity.

Since February 2003, nearly 700 more children and youths have been murdered or extrajudicially executed in the country.

While the Special Unit has made some progress in investigating a small number of cases, it continues to fall far short of its stated objectives. Since its creation it has only looked at just 400 of the over 2,300 cases of assassinations of children and youths which have occurred since January 1998. Only 88 cases were forwarded to the Attorney General's Office, and just three have resulted in a conviction. Despite the fact that the government have admitted that police officers have been involved in many of the killings, only two policemen have so far been convicted.

Promises made by the government have also failed to materialise. Despite the announcement last year of the establishment of a National Witness Protection Plan for judicial proceedings, to date no adequate mechanism has been established. Protection of witnesses is of paramount importance as they can be intimidated to prevent them from providing testimony against perpetrators.

Sara Saucedo Flores' son, 16 year-old Darwin, was arrested and beaten by a police officer in February 2002, held for two days and released. One day later his body was found with signs that he had been summarily executed. She has been intimidated and threatened after filing complaints against the two officers she believes murdered her son. No one has been brought to justice for his killing.

"Thousands of children in Honduras face a similar fate to Darwin. The Honduran authorities must comply with its obligations to prevent and punish killings of children and youths in the country, and to protect witnesses. It is critical that both the Special Unit and Attorney General's Office are given sufficient resources and independence to do this and that for the government to appoint ad-hoc judges to work specifically on these cases. The future of the country depends on it," said Amnesty International.

For more information, see Honduras: Zero Tolerance for Impunity: Extrajudicial executions of children and youths since 1998: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR370012003>

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