

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AMR 34/4218/2016

07 June, 2016

Guatemala: Decision to take Creompaz case to trial an advance for justice

The decision to send eight former military members to trial on charges of enforced disappearance and crimes against humanity during Guatemala's armed internal conflict is a step forward for justice in the country, said Amnesty International today.

Justice is finally getting closer for the victims of the horrific crimes, killings and disappearances committed during the country's internal conflict but authorities in Guatemala must now ensure that the Creompaz case does not suffer the same setbacks and delays that have marked other trials against the country's former military members and leaders. They must continue with all efforts to achieve justice for the victims of the appalling human rights abuses committed during that era.

The High-Risk Court A in Guatemala City found that eight former military members should face trial on charges related to cases of enforced disappearances and killings committed on a military base now known as Creompaz in the northern Alta Verapaz region. The accused were arrested and charged in January this year. A Judge released two additional men today and several others in previous preliminary hearings due to insufficient evidence, but said the cases could be re-examined if new evidence was presented.

More than 500 bodies have been exhumed from dozens of hidden mass graves since the first human remains were found at the site in 2012.

A UN-backed truth commission found that some 200,000 people were killed or disappeared during Guatemala's 36-year civil war (1960-1996). More than 80% were Indigenous Maya. The trial against former military ruler José Efraín Ríos Montt on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity has been repeatedly stalled and postponed. In February, however, two former military members were convicted in a historic decision for their roles in sexual violence committed against and domestic slavery of eleven indigenous women at a military base during the internal conflict. This new trial, along with the arrests in January this year of four former military members charged in the case of the 1981 enforced disappearance of teenager Marco Antonio Molina Theissen, presents a hopeful sign that the country is taking new steps towards achieving justice.

Read more:

Guatemala: Conviction of military in sexual abuse case, a historic victory for justice (News, 26 February, 2016)

Shameful decision to postpone Ríos Montt trial a new stain on Guatemala's justice system (News, 11 January 2016)