

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 18/006/2007

28 November 2007

UA 318/07

Fear for safety

BOLIVIA

Hundreds of protesters in the city of Sucre

**Killed: Gonzalo Durán Carazani (m)
Juan Carlos Serrudo Murrillo (m)
José Luis Cardozo (m)**

Protesters in the southern city of Sucre, Chuquisaca department, are in danger following violence by demonstrators and police on 24 and 25 November, in which three people died. During the second day of violence, the authorities ordered police off the streets in a bid to contain the fighting.

The protests came as at least 138 pro-government Constituent Assembly members met in a military training school in Sucre to approve the outlines of a new draft constitution. The meeting was boycotted by Assembly members from opposition parties. On 24 November, protestor Gonzalo Duran Carazani died of a gunshot wound. Juan Carlos Serrudo Murrillo, a 25-year-old student died on 25 November after being hit in the chest by a tear gas canister fired into the crowd by police. Another protester, José Luis Cardozo, died on 26 November of a gunshot wound he received during the disturbances.

According to national and international press reports, on 24 November police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse thousands of demonstrators, who were armed with rocks and clubs. The following day, some protesters armed with stones, firecrackers, and molotov cocktails attacked the headquarters of the Transport Police (*Organismo Operativo de Transito*), destroying computer equipment and documents, and setting fire to motorcycles and a dozen police and civilian cars. Following the attack, police officers were ordered off the streets by authorities in a bid to contain the violence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Constituent Assembly, which meets in Sucre, was set up in August 2006 to write Bolivia's new constitution – a task that social movements had urged the authorities to undertake for decades. However, this process has led to a number of violent demonstrations by civilian groups from different political parties in recent months in Sucre and other cities, in which several people have been killed.

The Constituent Assembly was given a maximum of one year to write Bolivia's new constitution. It is made up of 255 members, 137 of whom come from Evo Morales' party, the Movement Towards Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS).

The assembly has polarized the country and heightened tension between President Morales and his conservative rivals, who want more autonomy for the regions they govern. A campaign was also initiated by the opposition in early 2007 in Sucre, calling on the Assembly to debate moving the seat of government and Congress to Sucre from La Paz, which is a stronghold of support for the president. The demand to make Sucre the political and administrative capital has aroused tensions in the capital, La Paz, and also in Sucre. Sucre was Bolivia's capital until 1899 and currently houses the Supreme Court.

In August 2007, one year after the Constituent Assembly was inaugurated, not one text had been approved and so a law was passed to allow the Assembly to continue its work until 14 December. Assembly members determined to put aside the debate on moving the capital in order to move forward with their sessions. This decision was met with violent opposition in Sucre and sessions were suspended. Following one of the most

violent days of protest in Sucre on 8 September, the Chuquisaca Court of Justice ordered the Assembly to debate the issue of the capital during its sessions. On 21 November the Assembly suspended its sessions for the eighth time amid fears for the security of its members. It reconvened on 23 November, and during this session a draft outline of the new constitution was approved by 138 members of the Constituent Assembly. The new constitution will be put to a referendum.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- urging the authorities to take steps to ensure the safety of protesters, security forces and citizens of Sucre;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that thorough and impartial investigations are carried out into the deaths of three protesters as a result of violent protests in Sucre on 24 and 25 November, with those responsible brought to justice;
- calling for the authorities and political parties to take the necessary steps to facilitate dialogue, reach a reconciliation and prevent further violence;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that their security forces carry out their duties to guarantee the peace and security of the country's citizens and impartially uphold the rule of law.

APPEALS TO:

Vice-President of Bolivia

Sr. Vicepresidente de la República de Bolivia

Álvaro García Linera

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Fax: + 591 2 220 1211

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Salutation: Sr. Vicepresidente/Dear Vice-President

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Ministro de Gobierno

Alfredo Rada

Ministerio de Gobierno

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Salutation: Sr. Ministro

Head of the main opposition party Social and Democratic Power (*Poder Democrático Social, PODEMOS*)

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Salutation: Sr. Quiroga Ramírez

Head of the opposition National Unity Front party (*Frente de Unidad Nacional, UN*)

Samuel Doria Medina

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Salutation: Sr. Samuel Medina

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bolivia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 January 2008.