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Guatemala: Justice not served by state ordered killings

President Álvaro Arzú should commute the death sentence of Manuel Martínez Coronado -- the first Guatemalan ever scheduled to be executed by lethal injection, Amnesty International urged today as his deadline of execution at 6am tomorrow approaches.

“While the crime for which Manuel Martínez Coronado was convicted is a serious one, the death penalty is not an effective deterrent against crime but merely brutalizes society,” the organization said.

Claims by the Guatemalan authorities that lethal injection is speedier and more humane than any other form of execution are contradicted by medical research which has shown that the execution method can easily be botched. In one case it took more than an hour to execute a condemned man.

“Guatemala is not only out of step with the abolitionist move throughout the world and with Latin America’s traditional and much-admired stance against the death penalty, it has now decided to employ health workers as executioners,” Amnesty International added.

Martínez, an impoverished peasant from the eastern Guatemalan department of Chiquimula, was sentenced to death in October 1995 for the multiple homicide of seven members of a family to whom he was related and with whom he had been contesting a small plot of land. The land was sufficient to maintain the livelihood of only one of the families.

Amnesty International believes that Guatemala is seriously undermining the Inter-American human rights protection system by failing for the second time to respond to the requests lodged by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, IACHR, for “precautionary measures”. Under these measures, the Commission had asked that Guatemala suspend the execution of Manuel Martínez Coronado until it has time to examine the proceedings in his case to determine whether they met the human rights protection standards set by the American Convention on Human Rights.
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