

AI INDEX: AMR 45/02/99
31 March 1999

**PUBLIC STATEMENT
PARAGUAY
THE NEW GOVERNMENT MUST END IMPUNITY**

Paraguay's new government must ensure prompt, impartial and effective investigations into the killings of Vice President Argaña and of five demonstrators -- as well as the other human rights violations which occurred in the last days of former president Raul Cubas' administration -- Amnesty International said.

According to the organization, the political turmoil of the last few days -- which culminated in President Cubas' resignation and his flight into exile -- threatened to undermine Paraguay's fledgling democracy and resulted in serious human rights violations.

The assassination of Vice-President Luis María Argaña on 23 March triggered several days of violent clashes between government supporters and opponents and the police. The disturbances culminated in the deaths of five anti-government demonstrators, the suspected "disappearance" of a further 8 and the injury of at least 100 others during the night of Friday 26 March.

In a televised speech on 28 March Raul Cubas resigned the presidency in order to "avoid the spilling of more innocent blood for questions of politics". He was immediately sworn in as Senator, thereby automatically gaining immunity from prosecution.

Amnesty International is asking for the findings of the investigations to be made public and for those found responsible for human rights violations to be brought to justice.

In particular, State officials with chain-of-command responsibility who ordered or tolerated extrajudicial executions and other serious human rights violations by those under their command should be held criminally responsible for these acts.

Amnesty International believes that this principle should apply wherever such people happen to be, wherever the crime was committed and no matter how much time has elapsed since it was committed.

The organization is also calling for perpetrators not to be allowed to benefit from any legal measures exempting them from criminal prosecution or conviction.

Background

Following the shooting of Vice-President Argaña in the capital, Asunción, Congress brought forward impeachment proceedings against President Cubas. President Cubas was accused of "abuse of power" for arbitrarily freeing a jailed ally, former General Lino Oviedo, shortly after assuming the presidency in August 1998 and for refusing to comply with a Supreme Court order to send Oviedo back to prison to complete his 10 year sentence for an attempted coup in 1996.

Congress also accused Raúl Cubas and Lino Oviedo of being responsible for the killing of Vice-President Argaña, their political rival.

The decision to bring forward the impeachment process led thousands of pro and anti government demonstrators to congregate outside the Congress building in the centre of Asunción. Clashes began after police fired water cannons and reportedly charged the anti-government demonstrators.

Several officials of the Cubas administration, including the Chief of Police, have been charged in connection with the deaths of the demonstrators. They were accused of failing to deploy security forces when snipers -- believed to be supporters of the ex-president -- fired at demonstrators outside the Congress building. One person, identified from television footage of the attack, has been arrested in connection with the shooting.

Paraguayan judicial officials announced their intention of bringing charges of “negligent homicide” (*homicidio por omisión*) against the former president stemming from the deaths of the demonstrators. However, the newly appointed Interior Minister rejected a senior state prosecutor’s request for the arrest of Cubas, on the grounds that he “cannot be arrested unless his immunity is revoked by the Senate”. On Monday 29 March, Raúl Cubas fled to Brazil where he was granted political asylum. Senate leader Luis González Macchi was sworn in as head of state on Sunday as constitutional successor to Cubas.

Former General Lino Oviedo, who fled Paraguay shortly before Cubas resigned, was granted political asylum in Argentina.

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