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Venezuela: security does not come at the cost of human rights

The security measures taken by the Venezuelan authorities will only encourage more instability, polarisation and violence unless they adhere strictly to international human rights standards, Amnesty International today warned.

Hours before the demonstration organised for today in the *plaza de la Meritocracia* in Chuao, Caracas, within one of the new and recently decreed "security zones", the organisation emphasised the need for the Venezuelan authorities to guarantee the fundamental human rights of the participants and to ensure that the security forces do not once more resort to excessive use of force.

The organisation is concerned about the recent creation, by presidential decree, of "security zones", which cover wide urban areas in addition to the actual public and military facilities they are intended to protect.

"In addition to imposing unjustified restrictions on the right to demonstrate and the right to freedom of movement, the "security zones" involve an increased role for the army in controlling these areas, and run the risk of creating a context favourable to the perpetration of serious human rights violations," Amnesty International stated.

Amnesty International added that, when responding to possible public security threats, the Venezuelan authorities must accept their responsibility to guarantee the impartial protection of fundamental human rights and the rule of law.

All security measures that limit fundamental rights such as the freedoms of association and expression must adhere to the criteria established in international law and enshrined within the Venezuelan Constitution. According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the exercise of these rights may only be subjected to restrictions that are strictly appropriate and necessary in a democratic society.

Similarly, any violation of human rights committed in the name of public security must be rigorously and impartially investigated. "Impunity only serves to perpetuate the cycle of abuse, creating more insecurity," added Amnesty International.

In this context, it is important to recall the ruling recently issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the subject of compensation for human rights violations committed during the 1989 "Caracazo". The ruling determines the State's responsibility to investigate and punish all those responsible, and to compensate the victims' families. But it also emphasises the Venezuelan State's responsibility to avoid any repetition of such events by ensuring that any security forces plan or operation in relation to a breach of the peace is undertaken within the context of full respect for, and protection of, human rights.

"The Venezuelan State must uphold this historic ruling to the letter," Amnesty International

stressed.

The organisation also noted that impunity was not restricted to the events of the Caracazo but was characteristic of the way in which the Venezuelan justice system functions at all levels.

"The human rights violations that took place during the events of 11th to 14th April have still not been properly resolved," recalled the organisation. "Truth and justice are fundamental elements of the rule of law and a lack of diligence in investigating a crime may be interpreted as tolerance towards those responsible," it added.

"Other recent cases test the capacity and/or will of the authorities to carry out prompt, complete and impartial investigations," continued the organisation, citing the murder of two peasant farmers, Armando Douglas García and Carlos Ramón Parra, to the south of Maracaibo Lake on 19th September, and the assault on the Globovisión team in Caracas on 21st of the same month.

Amnesty International urged the authorities to resolve these events and duly punish those responsible.

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