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Guatemala must act to stop the killing of women

Amnesty International today urged the Guatemalan authorities to act to stop the high numbers of women being killed across the country and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice, ahead of International Women's Day on 8 March.

According to official figures, 685 women were killed in 2010 alone in Guatemala amid a culture of impunity, a legacy of the 1960-96 internal armed conflict which led to hundreds of thousands human rights violations which remain unaccounted for.

"Women in Guatemala are dying as a consequence of the State's failure to protect them," said Sebastian Elgueta, Guatemala researcher at Amnesty International.

"High levels of violence and a lack of political will along with a track record of impunity, mean authorities are both unable to pursue perpetrators, or just don't care. Perpetrators know they will not be punished."

"This culture of violence and impunity must end and women's human rights be respected and protected."

"Passing laws is not enough. The government must initiate effective investigations into killings, improve police training and ensure prosecutions are effective."

Less than 4% of all homicide cases result in perpetrators being convicted, despite the Guatemalan congress passing a law in 2008 that typified various crimes of violence against women and established special tribunals and sentencing guidelines.

The gender of the woman is often a determining factor in the motive of the crime, the way in which the authorities respond to the case and the way women are killed (female victims often suffering exceptional brutality before being killed, including rape, mutilation and dismemberment).

Described by the UN as witnessing genocide, Guatemala's internal armed conflict left 200,000 people dead. Systematic human rights violations, including targeted sexual violence against women, committed by State forces were not properly investigated and perpetrators never held to account, encouraging a climate of impunity and indifference to violent crime that continues to blight Guatemalan society.

In December 2009, 22-year-old domestic worker Mindi Rodas, was violently attacked by her husband, who seriously injured her face. The man was charged and sentenced but not sent to jail.

With the help of local organizations, Rodas was given assistance in Mexico to obtain surgery and later moved to a women's shelter in Guatemala.

In July 2010, Rodas left the shelter because she wanted to live closer to her community. A few months later, on 17 January 2011, her relatives were informed her dead body had been found by the authorities in

the capital on 18 December.

The authorities have not as yet initiated an effective investigation into her killing.

In another case, 15-year old Maria Isabel Franco was raped and brutally killed in December 2001.

Her mother, Rosa Franco has been fighting for justice ever since, but the Guatemalan authorities have not brought the perpetrators to justice.

Rosa has faced death threats and harassment by unknown individuals in the struggle to find those responsible for her daughter's killing, In October 2006, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights admitted the case on the grounds of unjustified delay in the investigation by the Guatemalan State.

The case is now pending before the Commission: the Guatemalan authorities have been slow in responding to the Commission's request for information.

Note to Editors

A four-minute audio interview with Rosa Franco, is available in Spanish on:<https://adam.amnesty.org/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=128361&index=0&total=1&view=viewSearchItem>