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Bolivia: Victims of military governments still awaiting a response to their demands

On a day like today, 34 years ago, Luis García Meza led a military coup in Bolivia and established a regime (1980-1981) in which serious human rights violations were committed, such as enforced disappearances, torture and arbitrary detentions against political opponents. Today, on the occasion of the anniversary, Amnesty International is calling on the Bolivian authorities to address the victims' demands without any more delay, to establish the truth and guarantee justice and reparation for all those who suffered from human rights violations during the García Meza and other military regimes that ruled Bolivia between 1964 and 1982.

Amnesty International recognizes that the subsequent trial and sentence given to the former president Luis García Meza in 1993 for various crimes, including mass killings, sent a significant message in the fight against impunity. However, this important effort has not yet been translated into other actions equally needed to bring to justice all perpetrators of human rights violations during the 18-years of military governments in Bolivia.

The whereabouts of the estimated 150 forcibly disappeared people between 1964 and 1982 remains unknown and the military files of that period, that could contain crucial information about the violations, remain classified. Amnesty International is concerned that relatives of victims, who have tried to obtain the files, even with a judicial order mandate, have encountered obstacles from the military authorities and as a result still do not have access to these documents.

Unlike other countries in the region, Bolivia has not yet created a mechanism which could establish the magnitude of the human rights violations committed at the time. Amnesty International hopes that in 2014 the Plurinational Legislative Assembly will make progress in introducing a bill to set up a Truth Commission. We hope that commission is supported by victims' organisations, satisfies the requirements of independence and impartiality and has a budget assigned to it.

Likewise, Amnesty International is concerned about the lack of interest expressed by the authorities in ensuring full reparation for the victims. The implementation of the 2004 Law 2640, to provide reparation to victims of political violence, generated more frustration than relief. Requirements of the law were very difficult or impossible to meet, as were the short deadlines, coupled with the lack of information provided to the victims and relatives of the victims during the process. The result has been that very few applications have been accepted. The process finished in 2012 with the publication of a list of 1,714 victims. The rest of the applications, approximately 4,200, were rejected. The authorities should review this process and make sure that human rights victims have access to fair economic compensation and other reparation measures to enable them to live with dignity.

Bolivia is failing the victims of human rights violations perpetrated by former military governments, and the requests of victims have remained unaddressed by the different governments until now. Some victims, have already grown old and are now afraid they may never see justice done. Amnesty International shares this concern and is calling on the authorities to show more interest and political will to address these claims. If changes don't come soon, Bolivia will not only be failing in its responsibility to those who suffered torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention or exile, but it will also be falling behind its neighbours as the region works towards truth, justice and reparations for all the abuses committed across the continent between the 1960s and 1980s.

Further information

The government of García Meza (17 July 1980- 4 August 1981) is considered to be one of the regimes in Bolivia, in which the most human rights violations were committed. It was during the García Meza's coup that the attack on the Bolivian Workers' Centre's headquarter occurred. Political leader and writer, Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz and political leader Juan Carlos Flores Bedregal were detained, killed and disappeared. To date, their whereabouts remain unknown. Also, on 15 January 1981, the so called "Harrington Street massacre" occurred in La Paz in which nine leaders of the Revolutionary Left Movement were killed.

The Garcia Meza's regime was one of many authoritarian and military governments that were established in Bolivia from 1964-1982. In those 18 years, more than 150 people were victims of enforced disappearances and at least 200 people were victims of extra judiciary executions. Around 5,000 people were arbitrary detained, many of whom faced torture, were deported or were forced into exile.

On 11 March 2014, Amnesty International published a report entitled "*No me borren de la historia. Verdad, Justicia y reparacion en Bolivia (1964-1982)*" (*Do not erase me from history. Truth, Justice and Reparations in Bolivia (1964-1982)*). The report documents the obstacles encountered by the victims of human rights violations trying to ensure their rights are recognised.

In 2013, the United Nations' Human Rights Committee, along with the Committee Against Torture, urged Bolivia to undertake actions to investigate the human rights violations committed during the military governments and review the mechanism to repair the victims.