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Guatemala: The abuses committed against demonstrators must be investigated immediately

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Amnesty International has called on the Guatemalan authorities to launch a thorough independent investigation into incidents that took place during demonstrations against the recently ratified Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Dozens of people in different parts of the country were injured as a result of the demonstrations against the Free Trade Agreement which took place on 14 March.

Civil society organizations reported that excessive use of force was used by both the police and army.

According to press reports, in the Huehuetenango area, in the north-east of the country, the army and police took joint action against demonstrators, leaving at least one person dead and approximately ten people injured.

With regard to the demonstrators, President Óscar Berger told *Diario de Centroamérica*: "The Berger government has made a point of not allowing privileges or impunity and if anyone was acting outside the law, proceedings will be brought against them (if there is evidence)."

"The Guatemalan Government has a duty to take seriously, and launch investigations into, all reports of human rights violations committed in the context of demonstrations, regardless of who is believed to be responsible," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is extremely concerned about the continued involvement of the army in matters relating to the country's domestic security. Under the 1996 Peace Accords, which brought 36 years of internal armed conflict to an end, the role of the army should be limited to responsibility for the country's external defence.

The organization notes that the actions of the army took place only a few weeks after the US Department of State certified to the US Congress that the army was no longer involved in Guatemalan internal affairs. The certification took place in the context of approving the transfer of funds already

approved for military aid.

General background

The Guatemalan Government, together with other Central American Governments and the Government of the United States, signed the Free Trade Agreement in May 2004. It was ratified by the Guatemalan Congress on 13 March and the President sanctioned it on 14 March.

At the time the FTA was ratified, Amnesty International wrote to the Guatemalan Congress expressing its concerns about the impact its implementation may have on the right to health.

For further information on Amnesty International's concerns with regard to the Free Trade Agreement, see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr340102005>

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