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Uruguay: Concrete reforms need to be made if there is to be effective human rights protection

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In an open letter, Amnesty International has called on the new Uruguayan administration to launch without delay whatever reforms are needed to bring about effective human rights protection and promotion.

"The recent statements made by President Vázquez about the importance of respecting human rights have opened the doors of justice for many people," Amnesty International said. "The next step is to reform any legislation which facilitates the violation of human rights and allows the perpetrators to go unpunished."

In the letter, Amnesty International highlights its main concerns relating to human rights violations committed under military rule and the failure to comply with international human rights standards, including the International Criminal Court. The letter also mentions reports of torture and ill-treatment in prisons, police stations and other detention centres.

"Torture is a serious violation of human rights. It is vital that the new government sends out a clear signal that such violations will not be tolerated."

Amnesty International has recognized the importance of the signing and ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court by Uruguay. It also welcomed the draft legislation relating to internal implementation of the Treaty that was submitted to the Uruguayan Senate for approval some time ago. However, it is concerned that so far Uruguay has failed to incorporate into its national legislation the obligations it assumed when signing the Treaty, namely, to punish crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

"Various international conventions and treaties which protect the population against genocide, torture and forced disappearance are of mere symbolic value in Uruguay. No one in the country can appear before a court of justice charged with any of these offences."

Amnesty International is also concerned about the failure of the Uruguayan authorities to cooperate in judicial investigations being undertaken in other countries to clarify the fate of the "disappeared", including those who "disappeared" in the context of the Plan Cóndor.

Amnesty International has called on the new administration to expedite investigations and legal proceedings relating to human rights violations committed under the military government, including by repealing the Expiry Law (Law 15846) which came into force in December 1986.

"The Expiry Law has meant that impunity has gone on for many years. The new government must take a firm decision to repeal the law and carry out investigations into all cases of forced disappearance that occurred under military rule and thereby pave the way for truth and justice."

Amnesty International is confident that the current administration will ensure that civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights will be respected and promoted, thus recognizing the indivisibility of all human rights.

"President Vázquez has made it clear that he intends to meet his obligations as far as human rights protection is concerned. Now is the time for concrete steps to be taken to keep those promises," Amnesty International concluded.

Background information

Dr Tabaré Vázquez Rosas took office as President of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay on 1 March 2005.

For a copy of the open letter sent to Presidente Tabaré Vázquez by Amnesty International (In Spanish), please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/eslamr520012005>

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