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## **Guatemala: Amnesty gives mixed review to Colom's first year in office**

President Colom's first year in office has produced some promising commitments to improve human rights for Guatemalans, but for those commitments to have real meaning, a lot more action needs to take place in the next three years, said Amnesty International today.

"Millions of Guatemalans are now living under the threat of violence and poverty. For their situation to improve, real action needs to take place urgently," said Kerrie Howard, Americas Deputy Director at Amnesty International.

The statement came on the eve of the first anniversary of Guatemala President Alvaro Colom taking office.

"Our assessment of President Colom's first 12 months in office is a mixed one," said Kerrie Howard "There have been positive moves such as the commitment to opening the military files but the Guatemalan justice system is still unable to deliver justice."

Amongst the positive measures taken by President Colom, Amnesty International highlighted the cooperation between the authorities and International Commission Against Impunity and the order to open the military archives relating to past human rights abuses committed during the internal armed conflict.

However, the organization warned that the human rights situation in Guatemala remains very grave and a number of issues must be given top priority if crisis is to be averted , these include:

**Discrimination and violence against women:** According to official figures reported in the press, there was an increase in the number of women who were killed in Guatemala in 2008. The bodies of those killed frequently showed signs of rape and other torture prior to death. Investigations into these crimes are usually negligent and deeply flawed.

**Public Security:** According to police officials quoted in the press, the number of killings in Guatemala continued to rise in 2008. It is believed that security forces could be implicated in some of these deaths.

**Justice and impunity:** The Public Prosecutor's Office continues to underperform, with approximately 98 per cent of all crimes remaining in impunity. Abuse of the appeals system also remains a serious obstacle, paralysing legal progress in many cases.

**Poverty:** Forced evictions of rural communities, the majority of them Indigenous Peoples, continued during 2008. Forced land evictions sank thousands of people further into poverty.

**Human rights defenders:** activists continued to suffer attacks and threats during the year. According to local non-governmental organizations, the number of attacks increased during 2008.

**Disappearance Bill:** A 2007 bill which would establish a commission to find victims of the estimated 45,000 enforced disappearances carried out during the internal armed conflict is still awaiting approval by Congress.

**Past human rights violations:** The 1999 Historical Clarification Commission (Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico – CEH) report documented 669 massacres. To date, less than five of these cases have resulted in convictions in a Guatemalan court. The military files believed to hold valuable information on historical human rights violations have still not been opened.

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