

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 23/067/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 231
8 October 2003

Colombia: Latest vote by Congress is a license for the military to flout human rights

Amnesty International today expressed serious concern after a Congressional Committee voted Tuesday in favour of hardening a bill which will give judicial police powers to the military. The new bill will allow the military to hold suspects for up to six days without a judicial review of their detention, including their right to challenge the legality of their detention.

The bill, if it becomes law, will enable the military to detain individuals, raid homes and intercept communications without judicial authorization. Tuesday's vote is the fifth of a total of eight votes that are needed before the bill can become law.

"Granting judicial police powers to the military will increase the risk that detainees' human rights will be violated and will further contribute to the military's campaign to intimidate, silence and discredit human rights and social organizations," warned Amnesty International.

Amnesty International continues to receive information about the systematic and widespread violation of human rights by the Colombian security forces, either on their own or in conjunction with army-backed paramilitary groups. Allowing the armed forces to hold detainees for up to six days without a judicial review could increase the risk of torture and ill-treatment of suspects held *incommunicado*.

Security forces and army-backed paramilitary groups are already engaged in unlawful detentions, raids and surveillance operations designed to silence human rights defenders. In becoming the object of constant military intelligence operations, human rights defenders will be exposed to greater risk of killings by paramilitaries.

"The bill granting judicial police powers to the armed forces will facilitate the military's systematic and widespread harassment and intimidation of human rights and social activists whose work is instrumental in exposing human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law by the parties to the conflict, including the security forces," said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International has repeatedly denounced the granting of judicial police powers to the military, which violates the spirit of international human rights treaties to which Colombia is signatory, and repeated recommendations by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States.

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