

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

## News Flash

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### **Guatemala: Human rights and rule of law must underpin elections**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the escalating political violence and the increasing threat to the rule of law which are marring the run-up to the November 2003 elections in Guatemala and undermining the possibility of a free and transparent electoral process.

"It is imperative that acts of political violence, threats and intimidation stop so that the rule of law can be restored in Guatemala and the elections take place in a climate where national and international human rights standards are respected," Amnesty International said.

On 24 and 25 July, armed mobs of ex-paramilitaries and officials from the ruling party the *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco*, Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), allegedly organised and financed by the FRG, held the Guatemalan capital to ransom attacking individuals and institutions and burning properties. Ríos Montt and members of the FRG allegedly involved in the events, deny any responsibility for orchestrating them. The incidents occurred following the Constitutional Court's suspension of the Presidential candidacy of Ríos Montt on 22 July. The court meanwhile heard motions by two political parties concerning the constitutionality of its original 14 July ruling in Ríos Montt's favour.

On 30 July, the Constitutional Court confirmed its ruling that General Efraín Ríos Montt's candidacy for President in the November 2003 elections was admissible. This admission contradicted previous rulings issued by the Constitutional and Supreme Courts stating that Ríos Montt's candidacy was unconstitutional due to his participation in a coup d'état in 1982, through which he became de facto President. The previous rulings were also in line with a 1993 decision by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

"An immediate and independent investigation into the incidents of 24-25 July must be opened," Amnesty International said. "All individuals implicated in violent events and in past human rights violations should be subject to legal proceedings and brought to justice and must not be allowed to stand as candidates in the elections."

"The Guatemalan authorities must ensure the protection of members of the legal community, journalists and human rights defenders amongst others. Law enforcement operations must adhere to strict international standards and not contravene the 1996 Peace Accords," the organization added.

The international community can play an important role in ensuring the restitution of the rule of law in Guatemala. The implementation of the recommendations of the May 2003 meeting of the Consultative Group of major donor countries and institutions to the Guatemalan peace process and the immediate presence of international election observers are key factors to prevent further unruliness in the country.

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