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Honduras: No more empty promises -- Investigate murders of children and youths

The Honduran Government must not shirk its obligations and continue to ignore the murders and extrajudicial executions of 1500 children and youths, said Amnesty International today in a new report *Zero Tolerance ... for impunity Extrajudicial Executions of Children and Youths since 1998*.

"Government initiatives, such as the creation of an inter-institutional commission and the Special Unit within the police force, created high expectations but did not manage to solve even a minimal number of these extrajudicial executions and murders in the country," added the organization.

Amnesty International has, for a number of years, been denouncing the execution of children and youths at the hands of State agents or unidentified individuals, under circumstances suggesting a "social cleansing" campaign. These murders continue to be a cause of concern among the general public.

Most of the victims come from the most marginalized sectors of society, among them the so called "street children" and gang members.

The perpetrators are, in most cases, unidentified persons, although testimonies from survivors and witnesses indicate that they could be police officers or civilians acting with the implicit consent of the authorities.

"In those cases where there have been allegations of participation of the security forces the authorities have not acted with diligence to determine the involvement of police or army personnel in the murders," stressed the organization. "Even when the perpetrator is not identified or is a private individual, the State also bears the obligation and responsibility of investigating the facts and bring those responsible to justice."

Furthermore, it is of great concern to the organization that the murders appear to hide social and economic motivations and that the extrajudicial executions and murders could be perceived by some sectors of society as the solution to the issue of public insecurity.

In this context, Amnesty International considers that with the measures adopted by President Ricardo Maduro -- of zero tolerance and the use of the armed forces in law enforcement functions -- there is a danger of breaching individual rights and freedoms set out in Honduran laws and in the international

commitments made by Honduras.

Amnesty International makes a series of concrete recommendations to the Honduran authorities with a view to protecting children and youths exposed to violations of their human rights. Among others, to investigate and punish past extrajudicial executions and murders and to take steps to prevent them in the future; to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee that the police force becomes a professional, disciplined institution respectful in the fulfilment of its responsibilities of protecting public order, the prevention, control and fight against crime.

The organization also calls on the authorities to create a permanent and effective system to protect witnesses and to formulate a plan and timetable of action with clear and verifiable targets and specific deadlines to complete the different stages.

"The authorities also should develop policies that work towards rescuing children and youth and reintegrating them into society, modernising and strengthening the child protection institutions," concluded Amnesty International.

"As long as the authorities keep ignoring their national and international responsibilities to investigate and prosecute these crimes and protect the human rights of the children and youth, complaints at international level will continue to weigh upon the Honduran government."

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