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El Salvador: No peace without justice

In the nine years since the end of the armed conflict, the Salvadorean authorities have consistently failed or refused to take any steps to investigate the massive scale human rights violations committed during the war and bring perpetrators to justice, Amnesty International said today.

In a report published today the organization is putting forward a series of recommendations to end the complete impunity which has so far shrouded those responsible for thousands of cases of torture, "disappearances" and political killings.

"It is time for the Salvadorean government to show the political will to break the circle of impunity which is preventing the country from moving towards true peace and reconciliation," Amnesty International said.

"Given the scale of the human rights violations involved, a systematic approach to the problem of impunity is needed," the organization continued, recommending that the government should set up a 'Programme to end impunity' with a clear schedule to bring about investigations and prosecutions.

A first step in this programme would be to move ahead in all the cases where judicial proceedings have already taken place or action is pending, including the murders of Monsignor Romero in 1980 and of six Jesuit priests, their cook and her daughter in 1989.

"All victims and their families should be guaranteed their right to seek judicial recourse and to reparation, as set out in international law," Amnesty International said.

The organization stressed that efforts to end impunity should include strengthening the judicial system to increase its reliability, and ensuring that the Office of the Procurator for Human Rights is fully functional and adequately staffed and resourced.

"The government should also urgently annul the 1993 Amnesty Law, which has allowed torturers and killers to walk free," Amnesty International said.

The organization added that the Salvadorean authorities can no longer shy away from their responsibility towards the victims and their families and from their international obligations to prosecute and punish all individuals found guilty of human rights violations.

Background

There is no definitive figure for the total number of victims of human rights violations during the El Salvador 1980-1991 armed conflict. However it is estimated that at least 75,000 people suffered torture, were extrajudicially executed or "disappeared".

The end of the conflict and the establishment of a Truth Commission in 1991 brought

hopes that war-time human rights violations would be investigated and those responsible brought to justice. However, such hopes were obliterated by the passing of an Amnesty Law -- granting absolute and unconditional amnesty to anyone guilty of human rights violations committed before January 1992 -- just days after the publication of the Truth Commission's report.

The Truth Commission's report documented widespread and systematic human rights violations at the hands of the armed forces, security forces and paramilitary groups -- **as well as a number of killings and abductions carried out by the FMLN** -- and recommended measures including the removal from office of all military and judicial officials named in the report and extensive reforms to the judiciary, the police and armed forces. To this day, these recommendations have not been fully implemented.

For a copy of the full report, please visit
<http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/amr290012001>
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