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Spain: Amnesty International appeals to ETA -- "Human rights are never negotiable"

In the wake of *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*'s announcement that it has decided to "reactivate the armed struggle" Amnesty International today reiterated its unreserved condemnation of past abuses perpetrated by the armed group.

While Amnesty International has no position on cease-fires in general, the organization opposes human rights abuses such as unlawful killings, abductions and hostage-taking. Given ETA's long record of committing abuses, Amnesty International is profoundly concerned at the potential threat to human rights posed by the recent declaration.

"As we have done repeatedly before, we call on ETA to respect human rights, whether or not a peace process exists," Amnesty International stressed.

"We also urge the Spanish authorities to refrain from responding to ETA's statements or actions with any acts in violation of Spain's national and international obligations -- particularly those regarding the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment."

In a report published last June, Amnesty International made it clear that respect for human rights -- while vital to the peace of Spain and the Basque Country -- could not be used as a bargaining counter by different sides in the process. The organization appealed both to ETA and other groups to cease the numerous violent and intimidatory acts, such as bombings and death threats made throughout the cease-fire period.

As well as making a series of human rights recommendations to the Spanish authorities, the Amnesty International report called upon ETA to put an immediate and definitive end to human rights abuses such as killings, abductions and hostage-takings.

"Human rights are never negotiable and cannot depend on the beginning or ending of cease-fires or on the particular circumstances of a peace process," Amnesty International concluded.

Background

On 28 November the Basque ETA announced that, after almost 15 months of indefinite cease-fire, and in view of the "clear blockage" and stagnation of the peace process in the Basque Country, it had taken the decision to "reactivate the armed struggle" and that from Friday 3 December the organization may transmit instructions to its commandos as to when to "begin activities". ETA has not ceased to abuse human rights throughout the cease-fire period.

For more information or to request a copy of the report *Spain: A briefing on human rights concerns in relation to the Basque Peace Process (AI INDEX: EUR 41/01/99)* please call Amnesty International's press office in London on: 44 171 413 5566