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BOLIVIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS DEATHS AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DURING ANTI-DRUG OPERATIONS

Amnesty International today condemns the deaths and human rights violations that have occurred in Bolivia during operations for the eradication of coca crops in the region of El Chaparé. The organization calls on the Bolivian government to respect the human rights of the inhabitants of this region.

"It seems that, in fulfilling agreements with the United States for the eradication of coca crops, the Bolivian government has disregarded its own constitutional provisions which protect the right to life and establish guarantees for all Bolivian citizens," Amnesty International said.

Disturbing reports indicate that during the violent operations carried out by the Mobile Unit for Rural Patrolling, *Unidad Móvil para el Patrullaje Rural* (UMOPAR), between 15 and 17 November, two minors were killed. Additionally, at least 10 civilians were injured by firearms and about 40 people were detained. Most of those detained were allegedly ill-treated while under police custody and the whereabouts of at least two union leaders is unknown.

On 15 November, 13-year-old Janeth Roxana Veliz Vargas died as a result of gunshot wounds during the UMOPAR attack on the town of Shinahota. On 17 November, a six-month-old baby, Remberto García, died allegedly as a result of tear gas fumes in the town of Entre Ríos.

UMOPAR authorities in Chimoré claimed that nine policemen were injured during the clashes with the peasants. The Inter-Institutional Commission which visited the area could not confirm this information since they could not talk to the police allegedly injured.

All local human rights organizations and the Municipal Civic Committee of Shinahota have denounced the show of force by UMOPAR and the security forces during these two operations. According to their reports, tear gas canisters were dropped from helicopters to disperse peasants demonstrating in the area. The tears gas affected houses, schools, and the Medical Centre. Firearms were fired indiscriminately and, according to the doctor in charge of the Medical Centre, people injured during the attack were forcibly removed from the Centre by UMOPAR forces.

On several occasions during the current year, the organization has raised its concern with the Bolivians authorities about the repeated complaints of human rights violations during the coca crops eradication operations in the region.

Amnesty International has repeatedly made appeals for thorough and independent investigation into the denunciations of killings, torture, and ill treatment, that the results be made public, and those found responsible brought to justice. The organization believes it imperative that clear and unequivocal instructions be given to all levels of UMOPAR and the security forces that human rights violations will not be tolerated.

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