



## **THE TIME TO DELIVER JUSTICE FOR THE EL CALABOZO MASSACRE IS NOW**

### **OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF EL SALVADOR**

Today, as the memory of victims of enforced disappearance and those whose final resting place and fate remain unknown is honoured in El Salvador, Amnesty International issues an urgent public call to the President of the Republic. It is time to provide answers to survivors of the El Calabozo massacre, the Salvadoran people, and the international community.

More than 200 men, women and children were killed in what is today known as the “El Calabozo” massacre, which took place on 22 August 1982 by the Amatitán River. The civilians – whole families, from babies who had not yet even taken their first steps, to elderly grandparents – had arrived at the banks of the river seeking refuge for the night from the wave of violence unleashed by the Salvadoran army in the region of San Vicente.

At daybreak on 22 August they found that the army had arrived. Witnesses tell how the officer in charge gave the order to shoot, and how soldiers from the Atlacatl Battalion proceeded to massacre over 200 people, raping girls and women before killing them. According to witness reports, the soldiers threw acid on some of the bodies, and the river swept away many of the dead.

This week, while many Salvadorans visit the graves of their loved ones, there will be other families who still do not know the whereabouts of their relatives, and who do not understand why their deaths remain in impunity. After three decades, it is time for the Salvadoran state to finally accept responsibility for the El Calabozo massacre, and to recognize and offer reparation for the scars which this terrible crime has left on the lives of survivors.

Amnesty International has closely followed the human rights situation in El Salvador for decades. During the internal armed conflict, Amnesty International worked to safeguard the human rights of victims of abuses and violations under successive governments.

The organization reminds the President that by virtue of the regional and international treaties to which the state is party, the Salvadoran government is accountable to victims of human rights violations and / or their relatives. This includes ensuring access to truth, justice and reparation. The organization recognizes the importance of the step which your administration took on 16 January this year, when the Salvadoran state officially accepted responsibility for the El Mozote massacre. During the speech which you gave to mark the 20th anniversary of the Peace Accords, you spoke of the obligations owed to victims of human rights violations during the conflict years, and of the state’s commitment to ensuring they received adequate reparation.

Mr. President, on Monday 5 November members of the Madeleine Lagadec Centre for Human Rights, representing survivors and relatives, will hand deliver the signatures of over 5,000 Amnesty International activists and supporters from across the world to you. The petition they signed calls on the Salvadoran government to:

- Publicly recognize state responsibility for the El Calabozo massacre, and for the unimaginable pain it has wrought in the lives of survivors and relatives;
- Explain the actions the Salvadoran state will carry out to drive forward an effective investigation into the El Calabozo massacre, and to bring those responsible to justice;
- Ensure that survivors and relatives receive reparation for the terrible losses they suffered, which after three decades continue to cause them pain and anguish to this day.

Thirty years is too long to wait: the time for truth, justice and reparation for the El Calabozo massacre is now.

Yours sincerely

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