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Amnesty International Uruguay expresses its concern about events in Haiti involving Uruguayan soldiers stationed there as members of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)

MINUSTAH has been deployed by the United Nations Security Council in Haiti with a mandate to, among other things, protect civilians who are at imminent risk of physical violence, support Haitian institutions and organizations in their efforts to promote and protect human rights, and monitor the human rights situation in the country. The commission of acts such as those reportedly involving members of the Uruguayan contingent of MINUSTAH are not only damaging to human dignity and contrary to the human rights obligations incumbent on the Uruguayan State but also contrary to the commitments it made when contributing troops to this United Nations endeavour.

Following the earthquake that devastated Haiti on 12 January 2010, the human rights situation became increasingly precarious for the Haitian population. This was recognized by the Security Council when it adapted MINUSTAH's mandate to the new circumstances by means of resolution 1908 (2010). It is in situations of crisis and emergency when human rights are most at risk. It is in these circumstances also when all actors, including the "Blue Helmets", must redouble their efforts to prevent human rights from being violated and ensure that they are respected and realized, as established in international human rights standards.

Actors involved in providing humanitarian assistance should also make sure that their programmes include the prevention of all forms of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, as well as procedures for dealing with it. In particular, personnel serving in United Nations operations should at all times ensure that they do not commit any act that involves sexual exploitation or abuse, sexual activity with minors under 18 or the exchange of money, work, goods or services for sex and do not get involved in sexual activities that may affect their impartiality or the wellbeing of others. In general, military personnel participating in such operations are prohibited from committing any act that causes physical, sexual or psychological damage to members of the local population, especially women and children.

Amnesty International Uruguay urges the Uruguayan authorities to expedite and conduct whatever independent, impartial and thorough investigations may be necessary to clarify the events recently reported. In the event that the claims that sexual violence was inflicted on a Haitian civilian are substantiated, the government should ensure that the alleged perpetrators are brought before the ordinary courts so that the appropriate responsibilities can be determined. The government should also ensure that the alleged victim, in particular, as well as the Haitian Government and people and the United Nations, are informed of the results of any investigations and procedures carried out. In the event that it is confirmed that a violation or violations took place and responsibilities are established, the Uruguayan State should ensure that the victim of such abuses receives full reparation for the harm suffered.

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