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Spain: End to ETA violence presents opportunity for human rights reforms

The announcement by Spain's armed Basque group, ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) that it has permanently renounced armed struggle provides an opportunity to reform the country's counter-terrorism laws and improve accountability for rights violations, Amnesty International said today.

ETA waged a forty year armed campaign against the Spanish state, during which over 800 people were killed and thousands injured. Yesterday it announced "the definitive cessation of its armed activity".

"Amnesty International has waited a long time for ETA to announce an end to violence " said Nicola Duckworth, Director of the Europe and Central Asia programme.

"We have consistently condemned the serious human rights abuses it has carried out in the Basque country and other parts of Spain, including attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks. ETA must now live up to its word by ending human rights abuses definitively and permanently .All perpetrators of past abuses must be brought to justice."

"The Spanish government must also ensure that security forces are held accountable for human rights violations they have committed. Counter terrorism laws and practices which caused or contributed to these violations must be reformed."

Amnesty International has consistently called on the Spanish authorities to abolish incommunicado detention and guarantee that detainees are given prompt and effective access to their lawyer of choice. They should also reform the practice of detaining terror suspects and those convicted on terrorism charges in locations far from their families, and remove ambiguities in the Law on Political Parties which could infringe upon freedom of thought, expression, association or assembly.

Last year ETA announced that it would not carry out any "offensive armed actions". On 10 January 2011 the armed group declared a permanent and general ceasefire, open to verification by the international community.

On 17 October 2011 an international conference attended by international figures including former Secretary General Kofi Annan was held in San Sebastian in the Basque Country. ETA's statement of 20 October was made following a call made by this conference for ETA to publicly declare "a definite cessation of armed activity".