

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Guatemala: Politically motivated charges get in the way of justice for massacre survivors**

In Guatemala, human rights violations appear to be addressed by pressing criminal charges against the victims, said Amnesty International as charges are due to be formally presented against nine activists and community leaders from Río Negro.

The charges, presented by the State Electricity Institute (INDE), include “activity against the internal security of the nation” and come after leaders from 18 communities participated in peaceful protests in September 2004.

“The charges against the activists are disproportionate, unfounded and clearly politically motivated. They send a strong message that mobilising against the government's agenda will not be tolerated,” said Sebastian Elgueta, Amnesty International's researcher on Guatemala.

“If the activists are detained and prosecuted, Amnesty International would consider them political prisoners,” said Sebastian Elgueta.

Amnesty International is calling for the charges to be dropped.

The protests were related to the loss of lives, homes and land incurred during the construction of the Chixoy dam in the 1980s, as well as the current lack of free running water and electricity in many communities, which they were promised. Protesters also complained about the impunity surrounding a series of massacres that took place in the area between 1980 and 1982 where thousands of people were killed.

The peaceful character of the protests was confirmed by a police report.

The communities agreed to withdraw from the demonstrations after the State Electricity (INDE) Institute agreed to initiate a negotiation process. Days later, the INDE presented criminal charges against the community leaders.

### **Background Information**

Carlos Chen Osorio, survivor and key witness of the 1982 Río Negro massacres; Juan de Dios García, also survivor and director of the Asociación de Víctimas de Rabinal (ADIVIMA), Rabinal Victims' Association are among nine activists and community leaders who face a series of criminal charges.

Numerous studies point out that the area was particularly targeted by the Guatemalan military in their campaign to combat armed groups due to its strategic economic importance.

According to human rights activists, between 1980 and 1982, more than 4,000 people were killed in the context of those military operations in the Rabinal area. 444 of the 791 inhabitants of Río Negro are believed to have been killed.

#### Public Document

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