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Guatemala: Deaths in land disputes continue

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On 8 July last, at least one person died and approximately 38 people were injured in the context of an eviction carried out in San José La Mocha, Department of Alta Verapaz, in northern Guatemala.

According to reports received by Amnesty International, at least 600 people evicted 200 families who were occupying land in demand of labour entitlements which have not been paid to them since 2002. Seventy-five-year-old Miguel Chen reportedly died from gunshot wounds.

This latest eviction is the third one affecting peasants from San José La Mocha.

"How many people have to die in land disputes in Guatemala before the government decides to intervene as it should?" said Sebastian Elgueta, Amnesty International's researcher on Guatemala.

Both national and international human rights organizations have spoken out about the violence to which peasants and indigenous peoples in rural areas have been subjected because of land disputes since Oscar Berger took over the presidency in 2004.

For example, the United Nations Committee against Torture asked for an investigation into forced evictions last May.

"The continued unwillingness of the government to implement genuine agrarian policies and halt forced evictions will result in more violence, death and injury," said Sebastian Elgueta.

"A large part of the current tension around land disputes would be alleviated if the Guatemalan Government implemented its commitments under the Peace Accords, including development of an inclusive agrarian policy applicable to all sectors."

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to carry out an immediate, effective and impartial investigation into the events that took place on 8 July last in San José La Mocha. The organization is also calling on the authorities to ensure the welfare of the evicted community, recalling in particular its obligations as a state signatory of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

For further information on San José La Mocha, please refer to:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/eslAMR340142006?open&of=esl-gtm>

For further information on land disputes in Guatemala, please refer to:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ESLAMR340032006?open&of=ESL-GTM>

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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