

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public statement

AI Index: AMR 28/004/2005 (Public)
News Service No.: 053
7 March 2005

Ecuador: It is essential for the intimidation of government critics to stop if respect for human rights is to be safeguarded

Amnesty International is extremely concerned about continuing attacks and death threats directed at political leaders, journalists and human rights defenders in Ecuador who have taken a critical stance towards the authorities. The most recent attack, which took place in the early hours of 6 March 2005, targeted Socialist Member of Parliament and Rector of the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Enrique Ayala Mora. Enrique Ayala was reportedly driving his car when he was intercepted by a four by four which forced him onto the hard shoulder, causing the car to overturn. Several shots were then fired at him.

Enrique Ayala was apparently attacked two days after expressing his opposition to recent changes in the Supreme Court.

Regrettably this attack is not an isolated event. On 2 March last, Amnesty International issued an urgent action on behalf of Orlando Pérez Torres, a journalist from the newspaper *Hoy*, who is said to have received a death threat. The international human rights organization has also taken action on behalf of the Fundación Mariana de Jesús, Mariana de Jesús Foundation, and its director, Francisco Peña, because of an attack and a bomb threat that took place in February and March 2005 respectively. These threats appear to have been made because of the critical stance these people have taken against the government of Lucio Gutiérrez.

During 2004 Amnesty International also reported continual threats and attacks directed against community leaders, journalists and human rights defenders because of their opposition to government policies.

Amnesty International believes that it is the duty of the Ecuadorian State to ensure that the right to physical integrity and freedom of expression is enjoyed by all. It is therefore urging the Ecuadorian Government to demonstrate its commitment and respect for human rights in practice by launching thorough, independent and impartial investigations into every one of the attacks and acts of intimidation that have taken place, making public the results of such investigations and bringing those believed to be responsible to justice.

The organization has once again reminded the Ecuadorian authorities that recognition and respect for the work of political, social and human rights organizations are crucial if there is to be genuine rule of law in Ecuador.

"It is essential for the Ecuadorian Government to take concrete action to ensure that all these people can carry out their work and express their views in accordance with the law and without fear of reprisal."

General Background

The latest attacks on political leaders, journalists and human rights defenders have taken place against a background of growing criticism of President Lucio Gutiérrez following the removal of judges from the Supreme Court in December 2004 on the orders of Congress after it had met in extraordinary sessions called by the President following a different procedure to the one established in the Constitution.

The recent dismissals and appointments of members of the judiciary by the executive and legislature has called into question the Ecuadorian authorities' respect for the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law.