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OAS: Americas fail to protect human rights effectively

Governments must take urgent and concrete steps to stop human rights violations in the Americas, said Amnesty International on the eve of the meeting of the Organization of American States, due to take place in Quito from 6 to 8 June, 2004.

Human rights violations in the region continue unabated. Economic crises, poor prison conditions, extrajudicial executions, violence against women, attacks against human rights defenders and the impact of corruption on the rule of law are among the serious issues of the region.

Most states in the Americas -- with the exception of the United States of America, Canada and Jamaica -- have signed and ratified the most prominent legal instrument for the protection of women in relation to violence at the regional level, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women - "Convention of Belém do Pará". However, thousands of women continue to suffer from physical and psychological abuse in every country in the region on a daily basis, giving the impression that the convention is being used only as a declaration of rhetorical intentions and not as a legal and binding instrument to prevent, punish and eliminate such abuses.

"It is essential that concrete steps are taken towards the national and effective implementation of the Convention of Belem do Para. The regional follow-up mechanism, proposed by the Inter-American Commission of Women, must be a body composed by independent and impartial experts. Furthermore, it is essential that civil society organizations are invited to express their views with regard to the creation of the follow-up mechanism during the expert meeting scheduled to take place on 20-21 July 2004 in Mexico," said Amnesty International.

During the past decade, women and human rights defenders have become the protagonists of a crisis all governments seem to be ignoring. Human rights defenders currently also face increased abuses. The Americas region remains one of the most dangerous regions in the world to be a human rights defender.

"Some structures within the Organization of American States still lack basic and reasonable mechanisms for the real and effective participation of NGOs in the General Assembly and other relevant activities."

"It is time for every government in the Americas to effectively start respecting human rights law and protecting those who work to protect others."

Amnesty International is also calling on the Member States of the OAS to take concrete steps towards the ratification of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court and the enacting of national legislation for its enforcement. Furthermore, it should reiterate that all measures against "terrorism" must be fully in compliance with international legal standards.

"Only by urgently ratifying and implementing all human rights treaties, all governments in the Americas will show a real commitment to the protection of human rights."

Background Information

The Organization of American States (OAS) will hold its thirty-fourth ordinary General Assembly in Ecuador from 6 to 8 June 2004. As in previous years, Amnesty International will attend as an observer and will take the opportunity to reiterate its concerns and proposals to strengthen human rights protection.

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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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