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## **Americas: End torture, end impunity**

*From prison cells in Brazil and Peru to police stations in Mexico and the United States, scores of men, women and children are tortured every day, in spite of national and international laws, and their torturers continue to walk free.*

*Amnesty International's new report highlights the countries where torture inflicted by state officials is widespread or persistent. Brazil is one such country, and the case of fifteen-year-old José (not his real name) is one example: José was arrested in June 1999 and held for two days. During that time he was beaten so severely by civil police officers that he has needed psychiatric treatment ever since. Latest reports indicate that José is also still receiving treatment for damage to his testicles as a result of the beatings.*

*Reports of deaths which may have been the result of torture or ill-treatment by state agents have surfaced in many countries, including Argentina. Vanesa Lorena Ledesma was arrested in Córdoba, Argentina, on 11 February 2000. Five days later she was dead. An autopsy revealed that her body showed signs of torture including indications that she had been beaten while handcuffed; severe bruising to the feet, arms, back and shoulders were also recorded.*

*The organization's global survey also reveals the often cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions of detention in Brazil, as well as torture and ill-treatment inflicted by Colombian state agents in counter-insurgency operations and armed conflict, and by armed political groups in Colombia.*

"Almost more worrying than the persistence of torture is the general failure by governments to take positive action to eradicate it and bring those responsible to justice," Amnesty International said. "Turning a blind eye on torture is tantamount to complicity in it," the organization added, stressing that as long as torturers are allowed to act with impunity torture cannot be truly eradicated.

The arrest of former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet in London in October 1998, has transformed the human rights landscape, showing that anyone accused of acts of torture at any level can and must be held to account. The Pinochet case has paved the way for other suspected torturers to be brought to justice, either in their own countries or in others willing to do so in accordance with the principle of universal jurisdiction. The recent arrest in Mexico of a former Argentine military officer and suspected torturer, Ricardo Miguel Cavallo, wanted in Spain for acts of torture committed during the military government in Argentina, may be evidence of this.

These are, however, only initial steps and the region's governments have yet to show the political will to combat torture effectively and end impunity for its perpetrators.

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