

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Bolivia: Authorities must guarantee the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of movement

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to guarantee free exercise of the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of movement. The organization is concerned at a road blockade in San Ignacio de Moxos, Beni Department, which has been set up by supporters of a proposed highway to be constructed through the Indigenous Territory and Isiboro Sécore National Park (*Territorio Indígena y Parque Natural Isiboro Sécore, TIPNIS*). This blockade is aimed at preventing indigenous peoples who oppose the highway from reaching Chaparina, the area to embark on the 9th Indigenous March.

The organization has been informed that the road blockaders are forcing local people to join them and are preventing the passage of both vehicles and pedestrians, including those trying to take part in the Indigenous March. This is affecting the exercise of the rights of assembly and free movement, rights which the State has a duty to protect. Amnesty International calls on the authorities to guarantee respect for the right to peaceful assembly and to ensure the safety of those people who intend to form part of the 9th Indigenous March.

The organization has also received news of violations of the freedom of expression. Worrying information has reached Amnesty International of an attack on a community radio station, Arrairu Sache, in San Ignacio de Moxos on 22 April. The attack was apparently motivated by the radio station having broadcast information on the 9th Indigenous March. The station director was allegedly assaulted and documents stolen. Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to guarantee the right to freedom of expression and to conduct an exhaustive, rapid and impartial investigation into the events in order to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

The authorities have indicated that, if the highway is not cleared, the security forces will intervene. Amnesty International would remind the authorities that the security forces must act responsibly and ensure that everyone is able to exercise their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly without risk. The organization recognises that the state has a duty to maintain public order but force should only be used where strictly necessary and even then, only the minimum force necessary under the circumstances should be employed, in line with principles of proportionality and necessity, as required by international human rights law.

This call is of particular relevance given the events of 25 September 2011 when the police intervened with excessive force as the 8th Indigenous March passed through Yucumo. The authorities argued at that time that the police objective was to protect the marchers from groups opposed to the march who were blocking their route. Nonetheless, the security forces dispersed the marchers violently. Amnesty International regrets the fact that investigations into the events of 25 September 2011 continue to make little progress and that these actions have gone unpunished.

Last March an Amnesty International delegation visited Bolivia to discuss the issue of human rights in the country, and the situation of indigenous peoples in particular, with the authorities, civil society organizations and representatives of the indigenous movement.

The organization is closely following developments in the TIPNIS conflict and calls on the authorities to enforce the rule of law and ensure that people can truly exercise their human rights, including the rights to assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of movement.