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Guatemala: The end of the EMP should mean genuine reform, not just reshuffling

Amnesty International today urged the Guatemalan government to ensure that recently announced changes to its intelligence agencies genuinely serve to reinforce their accountability and end the impunity with which they have carried out gross human rights abuses in the past.

The organisation's warning came only days after the official announcement of the abolition of the *Estado Mayor Presidencial* (EMP), Presidential Chief of Staff. The EMP was ostensibly tasked with providing security for the President, Vice-president and their families. In fact it served as the military intelligence agency and was responsible for some of the most worst and most high profile human rights abuses during and since the country's armed conflict.

"We welcome the abolition of the EMP, as called for by the 1996 Peace Accords, but regret that it has only come about after almost 7 years of continued national and international insistence", Amnesty International said. "We are also very concerned at signs that the military may continue to have influence over the new intelligence structure".

Former agents of the EMP have reportedly already been "recycled" into the EMP's replacement agency, the *Secretaría de Asuntos Administrativos y de Seguridad* (SAAS), Secretariat for Administrative and Security Affairs. The head of the SAAS recently announced that some 30 per cent of EMP officers would be "absorbed" into the new agency. It has also been announced that up to 35 military officers will continue to provide security to the President.

In addition, on October 10, a government accord was passed which provided for the creation of the *Departamento de Análisis Estratégico del Ministro de la Defensa*, apparently intended to function as an intelligence branch of the Guatemalan army. "We are concerned that this new military agency will not be subject to civilian oversight and that this could enable the cycle of security force violence and impunity to continue", the organization said.

AI also noted that modifications to the *Ley Orgánica del Ejército*, the law regulating military structures and operations, continue to be debated in congress. Proposals include reinstating the *fuero militar* (military jurisdiction) over common crimes committed by both current and

retired military officers, as well as making the unit of the SAAS directly responsible for Presidential security a dependency of the army.

Human rights groups in Guatemala have expressed concern that the ongoing prominence of military officers in providing presidential security, and the continued lack of civilian oversight of military intelligence structures, may mean little is accomplished by these new reforms.

"We are calling on the Guatemalan government to take the necessary steps to ensure the subordination of all military intelligence structures to civilian oversight, to identify and investigate EMP officers implicated in human rights abuses and remove them from positions of authority pending outcome of these investigations. Those found responsible for such abuses should be brought to justice", the organization concluded.

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