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HONDURAS: THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF IMPUNITY?: MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY FORCES CHARGED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Amnesty International welcomes the news that 11 Honduran army and police officers have been charged in connection with the temporary "disappearance" of six people in the 1980s by the country's Special Human Rights Prosecutor.

"These charges could represent a major step forward in ending impunity in Honduras," Amnesty International said. "This is the first time that military officials have been charged in connection with "disappearances" in Honduras and could be a crucial sign of the government's often-stated commitment to hold those responsible to account."

The human rights organization has for many years been calling on the Government of Honduras to investigate the whereabouts of at least 184 people who "disappeared" in the 1980s and to bring those responsible to justice.

Despite attempts by the administration of President Carlos Roberto Reina to reduce the power of the armed forces and reform the police, there continues to be a number of serious obstacles that could jeopardise these attempts at stamping out impunity, such as the intimidation of human rights defenders and relatives of the "disappeared".

Amnesty International urges the Honduran government to remain steadfast in their attempts to bring the perpetrators of these and other "disappearances" to justice and to protect human rights defenders, relatives of the "disappeared" and other witnesses of gross human rights violations.

BACKGROUND

The issue of the "disappeared" resurfaced during the November 1993 presidential elections after many years of silence and prompted the Human Rights Commissioner to undertake a study of past "disappearances".

These findings appear in a long report -- the first official acknowledgement that government forces were involved in the "systematic, clandestine and organized" practice of "disappearance" against political opponents throughout the 1980s.

Following the presidential elections, the Supreme Court appointed a Special Commission of Prosecutors to advise on the implementation of the Commissioner's report. The findings of the Special Commission were made public in November 1994, including the cases of several people who had been "disappeared" for varying periods and then "re-appeared" and had given testimonies to the Commission. ENDS\