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### *Honduras: The First Step Towards Justice*

The ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice declaring the decrees granting amnesty to military personnel charged with human rights violations unconstitutional, is a very important step towards ending impunity in Honduras, Amnesty International announced today.

The judgement issued yesterday, 27 June, refers to the case of six university students - three women and three men who were arrested without a warrant on April 27 1982 by armed men in civilian clothes. The students were taken to a police station and then on to an unidentified location where they remained "disappeared" for four days during which time they were tortured and ill-treated. Four of the students were released on the fourth day while formal charges were brought against the other two. After 18 months the relevant court threw out the case.

"This ruling is the culmination of the continued efforts of victims, the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights in the Attorney General's Office, and various human rights organizations," Amnesty International commented.

*The next step should be to activate judicial proceedings in this case and to start serious and exhaustive investigations into the 184 cases of “disappearances” pending in Honduras, to bring perpetrators to justice and put an end to impunity”.*

*“The victims and their families have the right to see justice done in order to put an end to such a prolonged and traumatic period,” added the human rights organization.*

*“Only when the truth is brought to light and abuses of the past are resolved will the Honduran society be able to face the future with a spirit of true reconciliation. This decision may represent the first step for Honduras and serve as an example for other countries with similar situations still pending.”*

### **General Information**

*The first legal proceedings against members of the armed forces for human rights violations in Honduras were initiated in 1995, when 10 military officers were charged with attempted murder and illegal detention. The accused argued that amnesty laws (of 1987, 1990 and in particular of 1991) which granted “full, unconditional amnesty” protected them. When arrest warrants were issued against them, the officers went “underground” and some are still in hiding.*

*In 1997 the Attorney General’s office filed an appeal before the Supreme Court in the case of the six students, arguing that it would be unconstitutional to apply the amnesty laws as the crimes involved were common crimes when only political crimes should be covered by those laws. The Supreme Court has accepted their argument.*

*The *Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos*, Inter-american Commission on Human Rights has also reiterated that “such laws remove the most effective measure for enforcing human rights, i.e, the prosecution and punishment of the violators ”. The Commission also believes that the application of the amnesty laws does not comply with the international responsibilities of the State.*