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Honduras: Stop abuses against indigenous peoples!

The Honduran authorities have the responsibility to guarantee the security and physical safety of the members of the indigenous peoples, some of whom have declared a hunger strike during the demonstrations that are taking place in the country, declared Amnesty International today.

Groups of indigenous people have initiated hunger strikes in protest against the dismissal of Gilberto Sánchez Chandías, the Special Prosecutor for Ethnic Affairs in the Public Ministry.

Amnesty International echoed their concern that the representation of the indigenous people at an official level would be diminished by the dismissal of the prosecutor.

“We are concerned that incidents like those of 12 October 1999, when 19 demonstrators and one policeman were injured, could be repeated”, added the organization.

On that occasion there were disturbances during a peaceful demonstration. Subsequent investigations concluded that, according to reports, the weapons used against the wounded corresponded with the calibre of those used by the police. Despite having promised to do so, the authorities still have not compensated the victims.

Indigenous groups have organised demonstrations over many years to present and reiterate requests to the authorities which emphasise the need to put an end to the impunity which surrounds the murders of indigenous leaders, to find a solution to land disputes and to improve the health and education services.

Other indigenous leaders have been subjected to threats and harassment, as in the cases of Salvador Zúñiga and Berta Cáceres, members of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations, *Consejo de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas (COPIN)*.

“Only when the indigenous peoples rights are respected and impunity comes to an end will there be no need for indigenous people to continue their repeated demonstrations” claimed Amnesty International. “It is time for the authorities to act, once and for all”.

Background Information

According to information received by Amnesty International at least 25 members of different indigenous groups have been assassinated in the last ten years. The majority of the cases have one thing in common: the victims had actively participated in the defence of the rights of

their groups. Nor, in the vast majority of cases have the authorities taken the necessary steps to investigate the murders, identify those guilty of the crimes and bring them to justice.

Indigenous groups initiated a hunger strike on 29 August 2000. The demonstrations began in Tegucigalpa outside the Presidential Palace and the Public Ministry, *Ministerio Público*, and then spread to the Copán Ruinas. Also, after having the roads blocked to them, another group who had planned to join the demonstrations began a hunger strike at a Police station in El Durazno, 20 kms from the capital.