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MEXICO: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS STILL CONTINUE ONE YEAR AFTER
GUERRERO MASSACRE

One year after the massacre of 17 defenceless peasants in Guerrero state the Mexican Government is still failing to stop systematic human rights violations, Amnesty International said today.

“The lack of political will of the Mexican Government in bringing all those responsible to justice has meant that a year later the authorities in Guerrero are still getting away with unlawfully killing, torturing and harassing the local population,” Amnesty International said. “It is only when the government takes more effective action that the cycle of impunity will end.”

On 28 June 1995, state police members and high government officials ambushed and shot at close range scores of peasants near the hamlet of Aguas Blancas. The victims, who belonged to the *Organización Campesina de la Sierra del Sur* (OCSS), a peasant right’s organization, were travelling to the town of Coyuca de Benítez to stage a peaceful protest against the “disappearance” of one of their colleagues on the previous month.

Amnesty International has acknowledged valuable steps taken by the Mexican Government to investigate the massacre including: a 360-page report on the case published by the governmental National Human Rights Commission on 14 August 1995 which certifies government responsibility in the killings; the arrest of dozens of police involved, and the suspension of the former governor of Guerrero, Rubén Figueroa Alcócer, in March, pending investigation, and a ruling by the Mexican Supreme Court confirming the highest state responsibility in the massacre. Nevertheless, many of those allegedly responsible have continued to benefit from impunity.

Meanwhile, the lack of effective government action to halt human rights violations in Guerrero continues to bear a tragic toll. For example, on 18 June Pedro Rendón and Ernesto Mesino Morales, peasants from Agua Fría in the region of Atoyac, near the site of last year’s massacre, were executed by a group of heavily armed men, who have continued to threaten the inhabitants of the region.

On 9 June 1996, Roberto Acosta Orruzquieta, the leader of the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), an opposition party, was extrajudicially executed by unidentified armed men during a meeting in the town of Coyuca de Benítez. The authorities have falsely accused members of the OCSS for the murder, despite evidence to the contrary.

Dozens have been murdered in a similar fashion over the past months in Guerrero. On 18 February 1996 nine peasants were unlawfully executed near the town of Coyuca de Benítez by members of the state judicial police.

Torture is also widespread in Guerrero. For example, on 5 June 25 Amuzgo Indians from Coachapa, near Ometepec, were brutally tortured by the state police. Torture included beatings, near suffocation in foul water and suspending the victims from the limbs for prolonged periods of time. They were forced to confess to stealing a calf allegedly belonging to the state governor's brother. They were all later released free of charge.

Amnesty International is also seriously concerned about the continuing harassment of leaders of peasant organizations in Guerrero. Many have continued to receive threats by local authorities for their demands for fertilizers and seeds -- essential goods which the local authorities frequently exchange for political favours from the population. For example, peasant leaders, Ranferi Hernández Acevedo -- who is also a member of the state Congress for the PRD and a human rights activist -- and Bertoldo Martínez Cruz, were recently banned under threats by the state authorities from negotiations on behalf of their constituency with the government. In the climate of systematic human rights violations and impunity prevalent in Guerrero such threats are potentially very grave.

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