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## Mexico: Strong Fears of Violent Reprisals Against Massacre Mourners

Fears of violent reprisals against people commemorating the second anniversary of a massacre of 17 unarmed peasant activists in Guerrero State on 28 June are growing due to a sharp increase in reported threats, torture and other human rights violations by the Mexican security forces in the region during the last few days, Amnesty International warned today.

The organization is appealing to the Mexican Government to guarantee the full protection of mourners' human rights while they gather in Aguas Blancas, where the Guerrero State Police and paramilitary forces in 1995 massacred 17 peasants and injured another 19 after ambushing the lorry in which they were travelling. They were on their way to Atoyac de Álvarez, a town near Acapulco, to demand the safe release of a peasant activist who had "disappeared" weeks earlier after making peaceful demands for basic rights. Many of the victims were shot at point blank as they pleaded for their lives.

"Although investigations have proved that the highest state authorities were involved in preparing and ordering these killings, only a handful of those responsible have been brought to justice," Amnesty International said. "We urge the Mexican authorities to immediately make fully effective the rights of the victims and their relatives to justice and compensation."

The State Governor at the time of the massacre stepped down from his post months later, following the broadcast of previously undisclosed film footage obtained during the massacre which confirmed the responsibility of the security forces, but the Mexican Government stepped short of bringing him to court.

Amnesty International believes that the impunity which so far has benefitted most perpetrators of gross human rights violations in Mexico, coupled with the growing unrest of large sectors of the population due to their unmet demands for basic rights, is leading to a dramatic increase in human rights violations.

During the last two months the human rights organization has published ten urgent actions on behalf of dozens of victims of death threats, torture and short term "disappearances", among them human rights defenders, all of them from Guerrero State. Many of the victims have been members of the opposition, particularly the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), the Democratic Revolutionary Party, a contender in the municipal and national mid-term elections scheduled for 6 July.

Hundreds of people have suffered gross human rights violations, including torture, "disappearance" and extra-judicial executions in the context of the Mexican Army stepping up counter-insurgency operations in Guerrero. Peasant discontent in Guerrero has also been capitalized on by armed opposition groups, such as the *Ejército Popular Revolucionario* (EPR), the Popular Revolutionary Army, which made its public appearance during the first anniversary of the Aguas Blancas massacre. The EPR is also alleged to have perpetrated human rights abuses, including at least one execution of a detained policeman in the State of Mexico.

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