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PERU: ONE YEAR OF LEGALISED IMPUNITY

“A year ago the Peruvian authorities granted immunity from prosecution to those responsible for thousands of human rights violations”, Amnesty International said today. An amnesty law promulgated on 15 June 1995 closed all investigations on human rights violations committed by members of the security forces between 1980 and 1995, and pardoned those few who had been sentenced for these crimes.

Amnesty International has documented thousands of cases of victims of torture, "disappearance" and summary execution committed by the Peruvian security forces during this period. “The amnesty law intends to conceal these gross human rights violations,” the human rights organization said.

Human rights violations have occurred in a context of widespread abuses by two armed opposition groups, the Communist Party of Peru (Shining Path) and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, since the beginning of the 1980s. Amnesty International condemned unequivocally the human rights abuses committed by these two groups, but stressed that these could never justify violations of fundamental human rights by the authorities, let alone the granting of immunity from prosecution for those responsible for them.

“Legalising impunity is an affront to the victims and their families. Impunity, literally “the exemption from punishment”, negates truth and justice and is the cause of further abuses,” the human rights organization said.

Uncovering the truth about human rights violations is essential for the victims, their families and for society as a whole. In the words of Raida Córdor, whose son was killed by Peruvian military officers in 1992: "... when I convinced myself that he had died, I lost all fear... when the press identified the killers, I became stronger... The news that the killers of my son had been granted an amnesty made me feel that the whole world had collapsed at my feet...".

Victims and their relatives, as well as national and international human rights defenders, have strongly condemned the amnesty law. Furthermore, United Nations human rights experts have expressed concern at the promulgation of this law. However, a year after its promulgation the amnesty law remains in force. In fact, on the day the amnesty law came into effect, the judge in charge of investigating the 1991 Barrios Altos massacre, in which 15 people were killed, courageously ruled that the amnesty law was not applicable in this case. On 28 June 1995, the Congress passed yet another law which explicitly prohibits the judiciary from passing judgement on the legality or applicability of the amnesty law, thereby effectively annulling the judge's ruling and ensuring that those responsible for the Barrios Altos massacre enjoy impunity.

In its latest report, *Peru: Human Rights in a time of impunity*, Amnesty International condemns both amnesty laws in the strongest of terms and urges the Peruvian authorities to take all the necessary steps to ensure that the thousands of victims of human rights violations and their families are given the right to know the truth. The organization also recommended that they receive fair compensation for the suffering to which they have been subjected.

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