

AI INDEX: AMR 46/24/95

EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 HRS GMT ON 8 NOVEMBER 1995

PERU: WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS IN JEOPARDY

Statements by the Peruvian government in favour of strengthening the human rights of women have not been matched by recent government measures, according to a report released today by Amnesty International.

Between 1983 and 1995 at least 4,200 people "disappeared" and thousands more were killed by government forces in extrajudicial executions. Many of the victims were women.

"Any hope that those responsible for these gross human rights violations would be brought to justice vanished with the two amnesty laws passed last June," Amnesty International said.

"By closing all judicial investigations into such abuses, and pardoning those few members of the security forces serving prison sentences, the government of President Alberto Fujimori has put a question mark around its commitment to uphold human rights."

The persistent failure in bringing current anti-terrorism laws into line with international human rights standards also casts doubt over the government's intentions about improving the rights of women.

The lack of human rights safeguards within these laws has meant that women suspects have been tortured, raped or otherwise sexually abused following detention by the military or police. They have also been denied prompt access to a lawyer and tried by closed civilian and military courts presided over by judges whose identity is concealed.

According to Amnesty International's report, "hundreds of women and men have been accused of terrorism-related crimes and sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment on the basis of little or no evidence". Many of them have been adopted by the organization as prisoners of conscience.

Such is the case with Myrian Guadalupe Galvez, a 29-year-old student and mother. She was charged with "crimes of terrorism" and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment on the basis that she attended a university course with an alleged "subversive" and because the police allegedly found a note pad of hers containing notes about "low intensity warfare". Amnesty International considers Myriam Guadalupe Galvez as a prisoner of conscience.

"This pattern of human rights violations by the state occurs against a background of widespread abuses by the Communist Party of Peru (PCP), known as Shining Path, and to a lesser scale by Túpac Amaro Revolutionary Movement (MRTA)," Amnesty International said.

Political and community activists from across the political spectrum, local government officials, and thousands of peasants who refused to join the PCP, have been targeted, threatened and killed by the PCP during its 15 year armed campaign, according to the report.

Amnesty International reiterates its unequivocal condemnation of grave human rights abuses by the armed opposition in Peru, but such abuses can never justify violations by the authorities of fundamental human rights.

If women, in the words of President Fujimori, "are not to be the ones left behind in the 21st century", then national and international standards upholding women's rights have to be translated into effective policies and practical measures.

Amnesty International urges the Government of Peru to:

- release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally;
- take all necessary steps to immediately annul the amnesty laws passed last June;
- promptly bring the anti-terrorism laws into line with international human rights standards; and
- stop rape, sexual abuse and other torture and ill-treatment by government agents.

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