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Dominican Republic: Political will is key to achieving changes in human rights

The new draft Organic Police Law presented to Congress by the President of the Dominican Republic is an important step in the right direction but still requires more work to ensure that the National Police Force becomes an institution that is respectful of human rights, said Amnesty International at the end of a research visit to the country.

During the visit, the Amnesty International delegation met with authorities and representatives of civil society to discuss the need for an integral reform of the police force, including reform of the police law, the National Security Plan and the appointment of the Ombudsman.

Among the positive aspects of the new bill of law, the organisation highlighted the introduction of regulations governing the use of force and firearms, in line with international standards, and the strengthening of police control and accountability mechanisms.

The bill of law does not, however, establish the principle of command responsibility, nor the civil liability of the police force as an institution when human rights violations are committed by police officers while on duty.

“The only way of guaranteeing effective and lasting police reform is to ensure that there is the political will to see through the necessary changes in the short, medium and long term, with the active involvement of civil society at the time of making decisions,” said Chiara Liguori, Amnesty International’s researcher on the Dominican Republic.

“The first test of this will be to organise public hearings in Congress so that civil society can ensure that the progress made with this bill of law is maintained and that problematic aspects are resolved.”

The Amnesty International delegation raised concerns that the National Security Plan was being produced without any consultation of local human rights organisations.

“If the National Security Plan is to be effective it has to be produced on the basis of a clear assessment, with well-defined objectives, and must not focus exclusively on fighting crime but must also take the causes of crime into consideration,” said Liguori.

The organisation’s representatives also gave their opinion on the appointment of the Ombudsman on 15 May this year, regretting that accusations of irregularities in the selection process had brought the new institution’s credibility into question. They also noted that an appeal had been filed with the Constitutional Court in this regard.

“The new office of the Ombudsman has a responsibility to gain the trust of the people, exercising its role of promoting and protecting human rights in accordance with the law and the constitution,” said Liguori.