

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: PRE 01/289/2013
14 June 2013

Paraguay: Justice still needed for all Curuguaty deaths a year on

The lack of effective actions by Paraguay's authorities to carry out a comprehensive investigation into the deaths of 17 people during a violent eviction a year ago is worrying, Amnesty International said today.

On 15 June 2012, 11 peasants and six police officers died and several were injured after clashes erupted during a forced eviction in the Curuguaty district of Paraguay's Canindeyú region.

Earlier this month a court began preliminary hearings into the case of 12 peasants facing charges including illegal occupation of land, criminal association and the killings of the six police officers in nine of the cases. No one has been charged for the deaths of the 11 peasants.

The hearings are currently suspended.

According to the prosecutor's investigation the police officers opened fire against the peasants in self defence. However, those conclusions contrast with reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and eyewitnesses regarding the potential responsibility of the police in the deaths.

"It's shocking that a year has passed and the authorities have not done enough to investigate all 17 deaths adequately. The circumstances of the incident must be fully examined and all those responsible for each of the deaths should be brought to justice without delay", said María José Eva, Amnesty International's researcher on Paraguay.

Some eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that some of the victims were shot dead following the confrontation even though they posed no threat to the police. Eyewitnesses also claimed that, a day after the clashes, two bodies were found on the contested land.

In March this year, the UN Human Rights Committee also expressed concerns over flaws in the investigations and called on the Paraguayan authorities to ensure an impartial, immediate and independent investigation into the 17 killings.

"To avoid impunity for the Curuguaty deaths, the investigation must look into the allegations that excessive force was used and bring to light the police actions that day.. The Paraguayan authorities must also ensure that due process and a fair trial are guaranteed for those who are facing charges in connection with the violence in Curuguaty," said María José Eva.

Background information

The 17 deaths took place on 15 June 2012 in the context of an eviction from contested lands in Curuguaty. Since 2004, peasant communities living in the area have requested that the Paraguayan Agrarian Institute give them those lands, which allegedly had been abandoned for years. The same peasant communities have occupied the land at least seven times.

Earlier this month a court began preliminary hearings into the case. The preliminary hearings are currently suspended pending the decision of an appeal court (camara de apelaciones) following a request by the defence lawyers regarding whether the judicial proceedings have to be halted or not before the land ownership controversy has been resolved.

The lack of clarity regarding ownership of the contested land goes back to the late 1960s when the private company Campos Morombi SAC y A claims to have bought it from La Industrial Paraguaya SA (LIPSA). There are reports that LIPSA donate the land to the Paraguayan Army in the 1960s but the title was never registered.

During the first day of the hearings the prosecutor requested a definite stay of proceedings (sobreseimiento definitivo) of three other people initially charged in connection with the violence. The cases were not resolved due to the suspension of the hearings.

The prosecutor also brought charges against two minors in relation to the violence in Curuguaty. In February 2013 a 17-year-old boy was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison but, due to his condition of minor, he was given alternative punishment measures. A second minor who is facing charges for the deaths of the police officers is still awaiting a different trial.