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Peru: Amnesty international concerned about critical situation in the Amazon

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the situation in the Peruvian Amazon following the events in the town of Bagua, in the department of Amazonas, on 5 June in which at least 30 demonstrators and 22 police officers were killed and more than 150 demonstrators and 24 police injured. Over 70 people were arrested, including several minors.

"The right to life, to physical integrity and to be free from torture and ill-treatment, are rights that should be respected at all times however exceptional the situation," said Nuria Garcia, Amnesty International's researcher on Peru.

Amnesty international notes that although the authorities have the right and duty to guarantee law and order, they should do so with proportional use of force, complying at all times with their obligations to respect human rights.

The human rights organization also called on the leaders of the Indigenous organizations to send a clear message to demonstrators that the taking hostages and the killing of law enforcement officers are unacceptable.

"The situation in the Amazon remains critical," said Nuria Garcia. "It is vital that the authorities take decisive measures to prevent human rights violations being committed or that their actions lead to an escalation of violence.

"It is also essential that the relevant authorities carry out an immediate and impartial investigation to establish the truth about the crimes that have been committed and to bring to justice all those responsible, regardless of who they are."

Amnesty International also urged the authorities to make public information on those detained by the police and the military, and to guarantee the right to life, to physical integrity and to a legal defence for all detainees.

The organization called on the Peruvian authorities to ensure that they consult and cooperate in good faith with Indigenous Peoples through their representative institutions before adopting and applying legislative or administrative measures that affect them.

Background

For over 50 days, Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon have been protesting about a series of

legislative decrees over the use of land and natural resources in the Amazonian jungle in the context of the free trade agreement between Peru and the United States. Indigenous communities were not consulted on this legislation, despite the Peruvian state's obligations under Convention 169 of the ILO. As a result of the protests, on 9 May the government declared a state of emergency in the area for 60 days.

On 5 June the National Police forcibly removed Indigenous protestors who had blocked the approach road to the town of Bagua. This resulted in fatalities and numerous wounded, both civilians and police. Amnesty International has received reports of an escalation in violence including the excessive use of force by law enforcement officers, as well as cases of police officers being abducted and killed by members of Indigenous communities.

Several leaders of the Indigenous organizations have charges pending against them for rebellion, sedition and conspiracy to rebellion and against public order. Among these is Alberto Pizango Chota, President of the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle). On 6 June the authorities issued an arrest warrant for Alberto Pizango. On 8 June, Alberto Pizango is reported to have sought refuge at the Nicaraguan Embassy in Lima.