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## **Guatemala: Allegations of police killings must be investigated**

Amnesty International has condemned the failure of the Guatemalan authorities to thoroughly investigate extra-judicial killings in which police officers have been implicated.

In a report released today, Amnesty International says that killings by police officers, often of young people who have either a criminal record or are suspected of involvement in crime, continue to be reported.

“Despite repeated reports and investigations by local and international human rights organizations the problem of police involvement in extra-judicial killings continues” said Kerrie Howard, deputy director of the Americas Programme at Amnesty International.

“The Guatemalan authorities must take seriously these allegations and investigate effectively and thoroughly”.

The media and the authorities have frequently referred to these extra-judicial killings as “social cleansing”, taking the law into their own hands to “rid” society of people they suspect involved in criminal activity.

Guatemalan officials are failing to investigate these killings. Amnesty International asks that the authorities fulfil their obligations under international human rights law to protect the right to life and to bringing to justice those responsible for violating this right.

Guatemala has a very high level of violent crime, yet has a very low conviction rate. It is estimated that 98 per cent of homicides go unresolved in Guatemala.

Amnesty International has received frequent reports of individuals who came into contact with the police and were then never seen alive again. The bodies of the victims, some as young as 13, were mostly discovered in vacant lots or on rubbish tips with their hands tied behind their backs, strangled or with multiple gun shot wounds inflicted at close range.

Investigations into the cases often take many months to begin, by which time much of the evidence which could be used to identify the perpetrators is lost.

Amnesty International believes that to date, there has been no serious initiative to hold those responsible for these serious human rights violations to account.

Amnesty International calls on the Guatemalan president to guarantee an end to extra-judicial killings and to bring to justice those responsible for these crimes.