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Honduras: Full and prompt investigation needed into death of human rights campaigner

Honduran authorities must launch an urgent and independent investigation into the murder of human rights defender Walter Trochez who was killed late on Sunday night while walking home through the centre of Tegucigalpa, Amnesty International said today.

According to sources, Walter Trochez was shot in the chest by a drive-by gunman and taken to hospital where he later died. Amnesty International fears that he may have been targeted because of his human rights work.

Walter Trochez told Amnesty International on Friday that he had escaped a kidnapping attempt on 4 December after suffering several hours of beatings and threats by masked men. They had interrogated Walter Trochez about individuals opposed to the de facto authorities who seized power following the 28 June coup d'état.

"The murder of Walter Trochez must be investigated immediately and those responsible brought to justice," said Kerrie Howard, Americas Deputy Director at Amnesty International. "It is essential that human rights defenders and opposition activists are able to exercise freedom of expression without fearing threats or attacks."

Since June, Walter Trochez had been documenting human rights violations during protests against the coup d'état. He was already known for his human rights work with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Honduras.

During his kidnapping on 4 December, four armed men had forced Walter Trochez into their van before repeatedly beating him in the face with a pistol butt and threatening that "even if you give us the information we're going to kill you, we have orders to kill you".

After finally managing to open the van door, Walter fell out on the street and ran into a deserted wasteland where he hid until his captors drove off.

"Amnesty International's fears that Walter's killing may be a sign of worse abuses to come in the atmosphere of political instability and fear that has prevailed since the copu d'état in June," said Kerrie Howard. "Walter's killers must be brought to justice, and the de facto authorities must ensure all reports of reprisals against protestors and campaigners are fully investigated and subject to the full weight of the law."