



amnesty international news release

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GUATEMALA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS -
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON CANDIDATES FOR PLEDGE
ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Amnesty International has called on all presidential candidates in Guatemala to take a stand on human rights and pledge an end to the escalating torture, "disappearances", and extrajudicial executions in the country.

In a letter to the candidates released publicly in Guatemala today, the worldwide human rights organization quoted official reports of more than 240 extrajudicial executions in the first half of this year alone - believed to be the work of "death squads" drawn from the security forces.

The victims of such killings and other human rights violations include students, trade unionists, human rights monitors and activists. Amnesty International is also increasingly receiving reports of abuses against street children.

"Of all the victims of human rights violations, children are the most vulnerable", Amnesty International said. "If authorities cannot take a stand against such abuses, what hope is left?"

The organization said the failure of the government to investigate most human rights violations and bring those responsible to justice has contributed to the widespread abuse. In only two of the thousands of cases of gross violations in the past four years does it know of charges being brought, and in one of these involving the murder of two agronomy students in 1987, the police officers convicted were released after their convictions were overturned on appeal.

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Amnesty International is an independent worldwide movement working impartially for the release of all prisoners of conscience, fair and prompt trials for political prisoners and an end to torture and executions. It is funded by donations from its members and supporters throughout the world. It has formal relations with the United Nations, Unesco, the Council of Europe, the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of American States.

The apparent tendency of many official human rights bodies to defend the government's human rights record rather than to act as impartial investigative bodies, has also played a role in the increasing abuses.

Amnesty International urged the candidates to commit themselves to the investigation of all human rights violations and bring those responsible to justice.

"Guatemala's human rights record cannot be wiped clean by simply ignoring the past", Amnesty International said. "Unless justice is seen to be done those who hold it in contempt will continue to act with impunity."

The organization also urged that the candidates undertake to protect street children, witnesses to human rights violations, and those involved in their investigation.

Finally, Amnesty International called on the candidates to make public the specific steps they intended to take to protect human rights.

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