

BOLIVIA: ATTACK ON PRESIDENT OF THE PERMANENT HUMAN RIGHTS ASSEMBLY PROVOKES INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNATION

The Bolivian government should take immediate action to guarantee the future security of Waldo Albarracín and other human rights workers in Bolivia, Amnesty International said today, following its condemnation of the recent attack on the prominent Bolivian human rights defender.

Waldo Albarracín, a lawyer and president of the Permanent Human Rights Assembly of Bolivia, was attacked by Bolivian police agents in civilian clothing on Saturday 25 January in the city of La Paz. Waldo Albarracín was travelling by public transport when he was violently forced out of the vehicle by eight police agents who blindfolded him and took him to an unidentified location. There he was subjected to beatings, ill-treatment and death threats.

"This shameful attack should be thoroughly and independently investigated; under no circumstances can it remain unpunished," Amnesty International said.

The organization stressed that the Bolivian authorities would otherwise be sending the wrong signal which could lead to a rapid deterioration in the respect for human rights in the country.

Following the incident, Waldo Albarracín was left unconscious and seriously injured at the Technical Judicial Police station in La Paz, where he remained detained in a cell until that night. From there he was transferred to the Virgen de Copacabana Police Clinic, but was taken out by relatives who were concerned for his safety. He is currently hospitalized in a private clinic in the capital, where he is being treated for a fractured rib and bruising caused by the beatings.

According to the information received, members of the Permanent Human Rights Assembly were initially frustrated in their efforts to locate Waldo Albarracín when agents at the offices of the Technical Judicial Police refused to reveal his whereabouts.

Waldo Albarracín recently made several public appeals to the Bolivian authorities to progress speedily with an independent and impartial investigation into the December 1996 killings in Amayapampa, department of Potosí. These appeals prompted the issuing of a detention order against the activist.

"Everything appears to indicate that Waldo Albarracín's tireless work in defence of human rights is the reason behind this despicable attack," Amnesty International said. "We hope that the Bolivian authorities will send a clear message to those responsible that the attack will not go unpunished."

BACKGROUND

Since its creation in 1976 the Permanent Human Rights Assembly has been one of the most active non-governmental organizations involved in the promotion and protection of human rights in

Bolivia. As a lawyer, an Assembly member and president of the organization for the last six years, Waldo Albarracín has spearheaded the denunciation of human rights violations at a national and international level. The International Conference on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized by Amnesty International in Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia, in May 1996, emphasized the unshirkable responsibility of States and inter-governmental organizations to guarantee the free exercise of the right to promote and defend human rights. Waldo Albarracín attended the Conference as a delegate of the Permanent Assembly.

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