

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Guatemala: Human rights defenders still on the front line**

Six years on from the signing of the Peace Accords that officially ended the conflict in Guatemala, the country's human rights community is still living under siege, Amnesty International said today, calling on the international community to insist on the implementation of the human rights component of the Accords.

The statement came in the run up to the Second Regional Consultation on Human Rights Defenders, which will take place in Guatemala from 23 to 25 July. Representatives of human rights organizations from 18 countries in Central and South America and the Caribbean will attend the meeting to discuss issues including the human rights implications of post-11 September anti-terrorism legislation and Inter-American mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders.

"In the first half of 2002 alone, Guatemalan human rights organizations reported 125 cases of threats, attacks and intimidation against those engaged in the defence of human rights. However, to date, not one single case of threat or attack on a human rights defender has been resolved," Amnesty International said.

"The international community, and especially the consultative group of countries, cannot remain silent in the face of such a critical situation and should take decisive action to promote full respect for human rights."

"Despite some positive developments, which include the appointment in May this year of a Special Prosecutor to investigate cases of human rights violations, Guatemalan human rights defenders live in a climate of fear reminiscent of the conflict years," Amnesty International said, stressing that impunity for past human rights violations and the failure to dismantle the structures of repression from the past contribute to creating a fertile ground for more abuses.

The organization recalled that those seeking truth and justice for the massive human rights violations committed during the conflict, together with those denouncing corruption and fighting for economic and social rights are bearing the brunt of a climate of hostility encouraged by open attacks on the legitimacy of human rights work by public officials.

"The Guatemalan authorities should take concrete measures as a matter of urgency to investigate fully and independently all cases of human rights violations against human rights defenders, to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, and to implement all the human rights

recommendations set forth in the Peace Accords," Amnesty International said.

**\*\*\* Amnesty International is publishing today a special issue of its bulletin "On the front line" on the situation of human rights defenders in Guatemala.**

### **Background**

The Consultative Group is made up of 18 member countries, 2 observer countries and 12 international finance and governmental organizations that have all financed the peace process in Guatemala.

At the February 2002 meeting of the Consultative Group, the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) presented a report which detailed the fundamental lack of commitment on the part of the Guatemalan government to address some of the most basic aspects of the Peace Agreements, such as the protection of human rights and human rights defenders, justice reform, demilitarisation and ending impunity. Clear benchmarks have yet to be set against which progress in the implementation of the Peace Accords can be measured.

At the conclusion of its February 2002 meeting, the Consultative Group said it would review its findings in one year's time. Country members of the Consultative Group are: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and US.

Public Document

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