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Mexico: A critical time for Chiapas -- human rights must be respected

Amnesty International today called on President Ernesto Zedillo and President-elect Vicente Fox to ensure that the imminent transfer of power in the state of Chiapas is free of political violence and human rights abuse.

There are very worrying signs that an already volatile situation in Chiapas is worsening in the run-up to President-elect Vicente Fox assuming power on 1 December, and Governor-elect for Chiapas, Pablo Salazar, taking office a week later, said Amnesty International's Deputy Secretary General, Vincent del Buono.

There is clear evidence that the situation in Chiapas is rapidly deteriorating. A number of disturbing reports have come to the attention of Amnesty International and the international community: the federal security forces have been mobilized, so-called paramilitary groups are threatening to attack displaced indigenous people, and indigenous communities sympathetic to the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) are resisting incursions by the army.

This is a critical time for Chiapas, added Vincent del Buono. *The important challenge is to ensure that everybody's human rights are respected in the region.*

The indigenous people of Chiapas have for too long experienced violations of their most fundamental human rights. Entire communities have been displaced, and many people within the region have seen their loved ones face violent death, arbitrary detention, torture, disappearance and death threats. Clearly, any rise in tensions and political violence in the region can only serve to further undermine their rights.

Background

In recent national and state elections, the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), in power nationally and in the state of Chiapas for over 70

years, lost both the presidential elections and the state governorship to the opposition. Following his election last July, President-elect Fox stated that bringing peace to Chiapas would require a political rather than military solution to the conflict with the EZLN.

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