

UA 224/97

Possible cruel and inhumane treatment 21 July 1997PERUPrisoners awaiting transfer to the new Challapalca Prison

Amnesty International is seriously concerned that prisoners currently awaiting transfer to the new maximum security *Penal de Challapalca*, Challapalca Prison, will be the victims of cruel and inhumane treatment as a result of the prison's altitude. Challapalca Prison is located at 5,000 metres above sea level.

Amnesty International has received information that the Challapalca Prison is about to become operational and that some 110 prisoners are currently awaiting transfer to the prison. According to internationally recognized experts in high altitude medicine, prolonged exposure to this altitude would put inmates at risk of suffering serious health problems and even death.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In a report published in 1995, Peru's Ministry of Justice claimed that the Challapalca Prison, under construction at the time, is located "at 5,000 metres above sea level", "*a 5,000 sobre el nivel del mar*".

In March 1997, the independent *Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos*, CNDDHH, a non-governmental organization representing 48 independent human rights groups in Peru, consulted experts specializing in high altitude medicine about the consequences of holding prisoners in Challapalca Prison. At the time of the consultation the CNDDHH, apparently unaware of information about Challapalca Prison contained in the report by the Ministry of Justice referred to above, worked on unconfirmed information that the prison was at 5,200 metres above sea level.

In a communication to the CNDDHH, dated 7 March 1997, Dr Carlos Monge Casinelli, a Peruvian and internationally recognized expert in high altitude medicine, stated: "Life is possible at 5,200 metres above sea level but health is seriously affected. This is the opinion of international high altitude experts. In my opinion a Penitentiary Establishment at that height can only be considered as making deliberate provision for a possible death penalty", "*La vida es posible a 5200m de altura pero no la salud. Esta es al opinión internacional de expertos en altura. En mi opinión un Establecimiento Penitenciario a esa altura solo puede considerarse como una pena posible de muerte programada*".

The CNDDHH also consulted Dr Jean-Paul Richalet, a French expert in high altitude medicine. In his response, dated 28 March 1997, Dr Richalet claimed that two problems may arise for people experiencing prolonged exposure at this altitude. Some people with pre-existing conditions (heart or lung diseases) may experience problems which may be incompatible with a stay at such a high altitude. Some healthy people, without any pre-existing disease, may not tolerate this altitude and suffer from high altitude diseases during the first days or after a few months or years. These may lead to death or serious illness.

Following a visit to the Challapalca Prison by a team from Peru's *Defensoría del Pueblo*, Ombudsman's Office, on 6 June 1997 the Ombudsman's Office issued a press bulletin. The bulletin stated, *inter alia*, that: "According to information compiled from a medical point of view, survival at more than 4,000 metres above sea level is difficult and presents serious risks to human health", "*Desde el punto de vista médico, según opiniones recabadas, la sobrevivencia a más de 4 mil metros es difícil y de alto riesgo para la salud humana.*" The

Ombudsman's Office recommended to the prison National Penitentiary Institute, INPE, *Instituto Nacional Penitenciario*, to review its decision to transfer prisoners and prison staff to the Challapalca Prison.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern that prisoners currently awaiting transfer to the new *Penal de Challapalca*, Challapalca Prison, located at 5,000 metres above sea level, could become seriously ill and even die, as a consequence of prolonged exposure to this high altitude;
- stating that Peruvian and foreign experts in high altitude medicine concur in stating that a prison at such an altitude constitutes a serious hazard to health and life;
- noting that Peru's *Defensoría Del Pueblo*, Ombudsman's Office, has called on the *Instituto Nacional Penitenciario*, INPE, National Penitentiary Institute, to review its decision to open the prison;
- calling on the authorities to halt the transfer of prisoners into the Challapalca Prison and to suspend the decision to use the establishment as a prison, until such time as a full and independent inquiry is conducted into the consequences for the health of inmates transferred to it.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice
Dr. Alfredo Quispe Correa
Ministerio de Justicia
Ministerio de Justicia
Scipión Llona 350
San Isidro
Lima, PERU

Fax: + 511 422 3577 or 422 7766

Salutation: Dear Minister/ Señor Ministro

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization
CNDDHH
Jr. Túpac Amaru 2647
Lince,
Lima 14,
PERU

and to diplomatic representatives of PERU accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 September 1997.