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Human rights in Guatemala under scrutiny by UN

Recent progress on justice for crimes of the past must be matched with action on current abuses if human rights are to be a reality in Guatemala, Amnesty International said ahead of the country's appearance in front of a UN human rights body.

The United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee in New York will evaluate Guatemala's human rights performance on 19 and 20 March.

Amnesty International presented the Committee with a shadow report looking at some of the main human rights issues facing people in the country – including the lack of justice for abuses committed during the country's internal armed conflict, the alarming levels of killings of women, the cases of threats and attacks against human rights activists plus discrimination against Indigenous communities.

“In recent years, we have seen some progress for human rights in Guatemala, particularly when it comes to bringing to justice some of those responsible for the abuses committed during the internal armed conflict,” said Sebastian Elgueta, Guatemala researcher at Amnesty International. “It is essential that cases of past crimes continue to be brought, to show that Guatemala is serious about dealing with the horrors of the past.

“Unfortunately, we've also seen that abuses committed against the most marginalized groups in Guatemala, including women and Indigenous Peoples, continue and human rights defenders remain under attack.”

Over the past two years Amnesty International has seen progress in terms of investigations and prosecutions on cases of human rights abuses committed during the country's internal armed conflict, including the partial declassification of military archives. However, the military have yet to grant access to archives of the period when most abuses took place, obstructing investigations and prosecutions of tens of thousands of cases of human rights violations.

Amnesty International also found alarming levels of violence against women. According to official figures, 631 women were sexually abused and violently killed in 2011 – 5,700 in the past 10 years. Very few cases are investigated and almost none result in a conviction.

A number of laws have been passed aimed at the protection of women but resources to implement them fully have not been put in place.

In 2011, local organizations also documented more than 400 cases of attacks and intimidation against human rights defenders – including journalists and trade unionists.

Indigenous Peoples across Guatemala continue to suffer discrimination – including by not being properly consulted when development projects are planned on their lands.

Note to Editors

For a full copy of Amnesty International's submission to the UN Human Rights Committee on Guatemala, please see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR34/001/2012/en>