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## **Guatemala: Presidential candidates urged to address human rights**

Amnesty International today urged Guatemalan presidential candidates to prioritise tackling human rights violations affecting hundreds of thousands in the country.

In an open letter sent to all presidential candidates, Amnesty International said the new government should improve investigations into past human rights abuses, tackle the alarming rates of violent crime and killings of women, provide long term solutions to land conflicts and protect the work of human rights activists.

“Human rights abuses are a common problem in Guatemala today. Those particularly affected tend to be the most vulnerable, the ones who are most discriminated against: women, indigenous peoples and those living in poverty,” said Sebastian Elgueta, Guatemala researcher at Amnesty International.

“The political will of the future President will be crucial in ensuring human rights are protected in Guatemala. This is why it is so crucial that candidates commit to addressing the human rights challenges ahead.”

Elections are scheduled for 11 September 2011. If none of the candidates receives more than fifty percent of votes, a second round will take place on 6 November 2011.

Municipal and legislative elections are scheduled on the same day. Violence against candidates has been reported, including the killing of three candidates since campaigns started in May 2011.

Over the past decades, Amnesty International has documented alarming levels of human rights abuses in Guatemala.

The internal armed conflict, which ended in 1996, left 200,000 victims of torture, killings and enforced disappearances. In only a handful of cases, those responsible have been brought to justice and few victims have received reparations.

Guatemala is today one of the countries with the highest rates of homicide and violent crime in the Americas. Many of the victims are women – with 695 violently murdered in 2010 alone, according to official figures. Most of those responsible never face justice.

Land conflict and forced evictions is one of the issues that most affect rural communities across Guatemala. Governments have so far failed to address the underlying causes of land conflicts and instead prioritized short-term violent solutions.

In recent years, Amnesty International has also documented a large number of threats and attacks against human rights activists, particularly those who focus on economic, social and cultural rights – including in

the context of land disputes, mining projects and labor disputes.

In the first six months of 2011, local human rights organizations reported 273 incidents of intimidations, threats and or attacks against activists. The vast majority has not been investigated.

“Justice for human rights abuses in Guatemala can be done. What is needed are efficient investigations, effective prosecutions and the political will of the authorities,” said Sebastian Elgueta.

“We urge all presidential candidates to commit to protecting and improving human rights in Guatemala.”

### **Background Information**

Amnesty International’s letter was sent to: Adela de Torrebiarte, Acción de Desarrollo Nacional (ADN); Alejandro Giammattei, Centro de Acción Social (Casa); Eduardo Suger, Compromiso Renovación y Orden (Creo); Manuel Baldizón, Libertad Democrática Renovada (Líder); Otto Perez Molina, Partido Patriota; Patricia de Arzú, Partido Unionista; Rigoberta Menchú, Frente Amplio de Izquierda.

For a copy of Amnesty International’s Open Letter to Guatemalan Presidential candidates, please see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR34/007/2011/en>