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El Salvador urged to repeal Amnesty Law

Amnesty International today urged authorities in El Salvador to repeal an amnesty law that protects those responsible for thousands of killings and disappearances during the country's 12-year armed conflict, including the killing of Catholic priest Monsignor Romero on 24 March 1980.

The organization also called on the country's security forces to fully cooperate with any investigation by allowing full access to their files.

"It is unacceptable that those responsible for thousands of disappearances, killings and torture have not been held to account for their crimes," said Kerrie Howard, Americas Deputy Director at Amnesty International. "The Amnesty law must be urgently repealed and full investigations, initiated."

Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero was shot and killed as he gave mass in the chapel of a hospital. During his funeral on 30 March over 20 of his supporters were killed by the military.

A report by El Salvador's Truth Commission in 1992 concluded there was evidence that former Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, now deceased, had ordered members of his security service, acting as a "death squad", to assassinate the Monsignor.

In 1993, a blanket amnesty was passed into law, shielding perpetrators from prosecution. Nobody has been brought to justice for any of the human rights crimes committed during the conflict.

El Salvador recognized before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2009 its international responsibility for the death of Monsignor Romero. However, no measures have been taken to investigate the incident.

Thousands of Salvadorans were murdered, disappeared, raped or forcibly recruited as child soldiers during the country's armed conflict.

Background Information

Between 1980 and 1992 in El Salvador a bitter armed conflict led to gross and widespread human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, other unlawful killings, "disappearances" and torture.

Among the victims were human rights defenders, trade unionists, lawyers, journalists, opponents of the government (whether real or presumed) and, for the most part, innocent civilians who had no direct involvement in the conflict. Whole villages were targeted by the armed forces and their inhabitants massacred.

Children were killed, “disappeared”, put up for adoption within El Salvador or abroad, or kept in institutions as orphans, including military barracks. In many cases they were told that they had been abandoned by their parents.

The Salvadoran army carried out human rights violations but "death squads" were also responsible for a significant number of the killings carried out in the period. The armed opposition, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional), FMLN, was also responsible for a number of human rights violations.

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