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GUATEMALA: THE PASSING OF AMNESTY LAWS THAT GUARANTEE IMPUNITY FOR VIOLATORS OF HUMAN RIGHTS WILL NOT HELP NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Today, Amnesty International asked the Guatemalan Government not to pass laws which grant amnesty to those responsible for thousands of serious human rights violations, without first guaranteeing the victims' right to truth and justice.

The organisation also expressed its concern about the shortcomings of the 'Commission for Historical Clarification', created by virtue of the agreement signed between the Guatemalan Government and the National Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity, URNG, the armed opposition group, in 1994.

In two memoranda submitted to the Government in August this year, and published today, the human rights organisation rejects the possible promulgation of an amnesty law or any other pardoning measure that might obscure the truth being known about human rights violations committed by members of the security forces and impede that those responsible are brought to justice. The human rights violations include extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances and torture. Until now, the Guatemalan Government has not offered any response.

Amnesty International is concerned that pardoning measures may be introduced -- either within the framework of peace talks or in their wake - which 'shelter in the cloak of impunity' those responsible for horrific human rights violations and abuses during the past thirty years.

"Years of human rights violations in Guatemala have shown that to guarantee impunity, through an amnesty law, to the perpetrators of serious violations and abuses against defenceless civilians, does not lead to national reconciliation; nor does it guarantee respect for human rights," concludes Amnesty International in its first memorandum to the Guatemalan Government.

The organization requests that previous government promulgations of amnesty decrees granting impunity to those guilty of grave human rights violations be repealed.

In the second memorandum to the Government, on the subject of the 'Commission for Historical Clarification', Amnesty International considers that the ambiguity of the Commission's mandate could limit investigations into the truth regarding human rights violations and abuses, and could restrict the victims' right to justice. The organisation also expresses its concern that the Commission's conclusions and recommendations will apparently not be referred to the judiciary, thereby foreclosing prompt investigations by competent, impartial and independent courts.

In the past 30 years, Amnesty International has recorded thousands of grave human rights violations committed by the security forces in Guatemala. The organisation has also condemned human rights abuses perpetrated by armed opposition groups.

In its memorandum regarding the 'Commission for Historical Clarification', the human rights organisation lists a series of recommendations regarding the investigation of human rights violations. Also included in the report are recommendations about the Commission's composition, power and methodology. These recommendations are aimed at ensuring that the full truth is revealed, that those

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responsible for serious human rights violations are brought to justice and, that just compensation is awarded to the victims and their relatives for the suffering they continue to endure.

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