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# *amnesty international*

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## £HONDURAS

### @Three former detainees allege torture

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EXTERNAL

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Three former detainees alleged that they were tortured while held for two days by police in the municipality of Jesús de Otero, Intibucá in December 1992. **Jesús Arquimides Monzón Mejía, Miguel Angel Montoya and Benjamín Manzanares Castro** were arrested without warrant on 2 December in a joint operation by the **Dirección Nacional de Investigaciones**, DNI, National Directorate of Investigations, and the **Fuerza de Seguridad Pública**, Public Security Force. They said they were taken to a local police station where they were beaten on different parts of the body and kned in the stomach to make them to confess to a robbery which they deny having committed. They said they were also subjected to the **capucha** seven times. This technique is frequently used in Honduras and consists of a hood or sheet placed over the face until the person almost suffocates.

After two days, and after pressure from relatives, the detainees were taken before a court and released for lack of evidence. However, on leaving the DNI police station they were told they now had a criminal record and that if they wanted to get rid of the record they would have to pay 200 lempiras each.

When the men went to present a complaint to the **Oficina de Responsabilidad Profesional de las Fuerzas Armadas**, ORP, Office of Professional Responsibility of the Armed Forces, they were reportedly treated in an intimidating manner. The office was set up in late 1991 to investigate complaints of human rights violations attributed to members of the Armed Forces, including police. A complaint was also presented to the **Comisionado Nacional de Protección de los Derechos Humanos**, National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights, who stated that he would investigate the case but it is not known what steps have been taken so far. The post of National Commissioner, which has

ministerial rank, was created in 1992 as part of a state modernisation programme. The commissioner's role includes monitoring respect for human rights and investigating allegations of human rights violations. The first Commissioner, Lic. Leo Valladares, was appointed in November 1992.

The allegations of torture made by the three former detainees are consistent with other reports received from Honduras. Though it is difficult to assess how widespread the use of torture and ill-treatment is against criminal suspects, information available to Amnesty International suggests that the pattern of abuses has been maintained over the past few years and that initiatives such as the setting up of offices to investigate human rights abuses have not resulted in the eradication of these practices. Reports received in 1992 showed that beatings were the most common method used. Some detainees were subjected to the **capucha**. One man described how his legs and arms were tied up and said that he was suspended from a beam and spun round until he fell to the ground (known as the "helicopter" technique.) While most cases of torture reported to Amnesty International in 1992 concerned individuals accused of common crimes, a group of five detainees arrested in May were interrogated about their alleged activities in an opposition group.

In 1991, Amnesty International submitted a number of recommendations to the Honduran government which it believed would help eradicate torture and other human rights violations. It called in particular for full investigations into allegations of torture and the bringing to justice of those responsible. It also requested information about individual members of the Armed Forces who the government said had been prosecuted for human rights violations. The organization never received the requested information and to its knowledge, no member of the Armed Forces has been convicted of offences relating to torture, whether of political detainees or criminal suspects. Torture violates article 68 of the Honduran Constitution, which states that "*Everyone has the right to respect for their physical, mental and moral integrity. Noone shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*" It is also in violation of article 5 of the American Convention on Human Rights, ratified by Honduras, which guarantees the right to personal integrity. Honduras has not ratified the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment or the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture, though it has signed the latter.

Amnesty International is calling for full investigations into the allegations of torture made by Jesús Arquimides Monzón Mejía, Miguel Angel Montoya and Benjamín Manzanares Castro, that those responsible be brought to justice and that the government takes steps to end the use of torture by police.

<b>KEYWORDS:</b> TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT <sup>1</sup> / CONFESSIONS / POLICE / IMPUNITY /
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<sup>1</sup>Toda persona tiene derecho a que se respete su integridad física, psíquica y moral. Nadie debe ser sometido a torturas, ni penas o tratos crueles, inhumanos o degradantes.

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