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HONDURAS: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES THE STEPS BEING TAKEN IN HONDURAS TO BRING TO JUSTICE THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR PAST HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

We welcome the steps being taken in Honduras to bring to justice those responsible for past human rights violations, Amnesty International said as the first security officials charged with committing human rights violations were arrested.

In the first decision of its kind ever to take place in Honduras, three army and police officers were arrested this week. They had been charged in July 1995, along with seven others, by the Special Human Rights Prosecutor in the Attorney General's Office for the attempted murder and illegal detention of six university students in 1982.

The Honduran armed forces have consistently denied charges and attempted to halt procedures initiated to clarify past human rights violations arguing, amongst other things, that those accused are covered by amnesty laws passed in 1986 and 1991. Amnesty International believes, however, that the 1991 amnesty decree explicitly recognizes Honduras' international human rights obligations, which include the bringing to justice of state officials implicated in cases of fundamental human rights violations.

The corruption and lack of independence of the Honduran judiciary in the past permitted its subjugation to the military and its ineffectiveness in investigating and preventing human rights abuses. Amnesty International considers this case to be a demonstration of judicial authorities' readiness today to meet the historic challenge of ending impunity and ensuring that Honduras complies with its obligations under international and domestic law.

The human rights organization is extremely concerned about the threats the judge in charge of this case, Roy Edmundo Molina, has received -- particularly about reports that shots were fired in his court -- and it calls on the government of Honduras to guarantee his safety.

"We urge the authorities of Honduras to guarantee the safety of all those involved in this process of bringing perpetrators of human rights violations to justice. All officials involved, including judge Molina, witnesses, relatives and human rights activists who want to see justice carried out should be free of intimidation and threats," Amnesty International said.

"The international community should support all attempts to bring to justice those responsible for past human rights violations and send a clear message that such violations will not be tolerated in the future."

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