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MEXICO: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR GENUINELY INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION INTO CHIAPAS MASSACRE AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARAMILITARY GROUPS

The massacre of 45 indigenous people in the state of Chiapas last Monday requires much more than a routine investigation by the authorities, Amnesty International said today.

“This incident -- the latest in a series of individual and mass killings -- not only underlines the imperative need for the authorities to bring to justice those responsible for planning and carrying out the Chiapas massacre. It also requires a thorough, prompt and independent public investigation into the growth of paramilitary groups widely reported to be operating with the support of the security forces, local authorities and politicians linked to the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), Mexico’s ruling political party,” the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International is calling on President Ernesto Zedillo to exercise his political and constitutional authority to ensure that such a commission is promptly established. The organization is also urging the authorities to take all the necessary measures to ensure that members of indigenous communities are guaranteed their protection from further attacks.

The investigation should be presided over by a person who is recognized, both within Mexico and by the international community, as someone whose standing reflects political independence and moral authority. Similarly, the composition of the body conducting the investigation must reflect not only its independence, but its commitment to upholding universally recognized international human rights standards.

In addition, the commission should not only address the mushrooming of paramilitary groups in Mexico but also the political, policy and practical response to them by state and federal authorities.

“Upholding the rule of law and the protection of human rights is one of the pressing issues which the vast majority of Mexicans wish to see exercised, particularly if there is not to be a repetition of Monday’s tragic killings,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International’s call on the authorities follows the submission of a memorandum to President Zedillo last September in which the organization expressed concern that previous investigations into human rights violations have, for the most part, failed to identify and bring to justice the intellectual and practical authors of these gross human rights violations.

“Impunity, a hallmark which undermines the protection of human rights and facilitates the commission of further human rights violations, has prevailed for too long.”

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