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Peru: Human rights must be a priority for the new government

All party manifestos must include and prioritize human rights promotion and protection, said Amnesty International in its letter to all presidential candidates in Peru ahead of the presidential elections scheduled for 8 April 2001.

In a letter sent to all presidential candidates on 12 March, the organization welcomed the progress made so far by the Transitional Government led by Dr Valentín Paniagua Corazao in consolidating the rule of law in the country.

This is an historic moment for Peru," said Amnesty International. "It now has the opportunity to put an end to the disruption to the rule of law which has been going on in the country for almost two decades," said Amnesty International.

In its letter to the presidential candidates, Amnesty International underlines the concerns the organization has had with regard to human rights over the past two decades.

Among the points Amnesty International includes in its letter to the candidates is a request to whichever political party has responsibility for making up the new government to repeal and annul the 1995 amnesty laws which resulted in thousands of violations carried out by the security forces between 1980 and 1995 going unpunished. The organization believes that impunity puts a whole section of the population above the law, thereby rendering justice - an essential principle inherent to the rule of law - worthless.

A Democracy means full implementation and protection of human rights and the existence of an independent and impartial judiciary to investigate and bring to trial those who have broken the law and violated human rights,@ the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International also called on the candidates to commit themselves in their party manifestos to providing fair and appropriate reparation to the victims of past human rights violations and their relatives and to supporting the setting up of a Commission to establish the truth about human rights violations committed since 1980.

The organization also pointed out the need to revise anti-terrorist legislation to bring it into line with Peru=s international obligations.

A The anti-terrorist laws have denied thousands of defendants the right to a fair trial and led to the imprisonment of hundreds of people on false terrorism charges,@ Amnesty International pointed out. The organization is taking the opportunity to urge the presidential candidates to commit themselves to releasing and compensating all the innocent prisoners@ and to finding a just solution for those against whom arrest warrants have been issued, as well as to repealing any provisions of the Constitution and other laws which allow civilians to be tried in military courts so that everyone has the right to a fair trial.

The human rights organization also asked the new government to commit itself to combatting and eradicating torture - a practice which has been widespread throughout the country over the last two decades - by implementing specific prevention programs and investigating, prosecuting and punishing those responsible. In addition, it called for an end to any kind of discrimination against women, children, racial and ethnic minorities and persons targeted because of their sexual orientation

so that human rights violations are no longer perpetrated against those sections of the population.

The organization also believes that it is essential for the new government to show its support for the work of human rights defenders by providing them with every possible protection to be able to carry out their work and ensuring that the rights to freedom of expression and information are fully guaranteed and promoted at all times.

We hope that after the elections a new stage in the history of Peru will begin in which human rights will be seen as a priority,@ stressed Vincent del Buono, Deputy Secretary General of the organization.

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