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MEXICO: RENEWAL OF CONFLICT IN CHIAPAS

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at reports of renewed conflict in the southern state of Chiapas and fears an escalation of serious human rights violations in the region.

On 19 December hundreds of members and supporters of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), Zapatista National Liberation Army -- an armed opposition group composed mostly of Indian peasants -- occupied 38 municipalities and blocked eight highways in Chiapas.

Although the actions were carried out peacefully, subsequent movement of army troops in the region have sharply raised fears about the imminent possibility of clashes between the army and the EZLN, and of an escalation of serious human rights violations in the region.

"We are gravely concerned about the situation in Chiapas and are calling on the Mexican authorities and the EZLN to ensure the full respect of the human rights of the population," Amnesty International said.

On 1 January this year, the previously unknown EZLN seized several towns in Chiapas demanding a series of rights, including land, health, education and an end to abuses against the indigenous peoples in Chiapas. In the following days, several violent clashes between the Mexican army and the EZLN reportedly took place during which the rebels abandoned most of the towns and retreated to the mountainous southern region of the state.

Serious -- and as yet unresolved -- human rights violations and breaches of humanitarian law by the army were reported during the conflict, including scores of cases of torture and dozens of extra-judicial executions. The EZLN took hostages who were later released unharmed.

Following the growing outcry against human rights violations in Chiapas, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari named a peace envoy and declared a cease-fire on 12 January. This lasted until early December, despite growing military presence in the region, which eventually amounted to more than 40,000 troops, some of whom were reportedly responsible for continuing human rights violations.

Peace talks between the government and EZLN, mediated by the Catholic church, began in February but were suspended in June and on 6 December the EZLN withdrew from the cease fire.

The EZLN expressed its opposition to the newly elected governor of Chiapas Eduardo Robledo, who took office on 8 December. They demanded his resignation on behalf of Amado Avendaño, the runner-up to August elections, who, they claimed, had lost as a result of vote-rigging. The EZLN has also demanded the federal government's recognition of the non-governmental Comisión Nacional de Intermediación (CONAI), National Mediation Commission, to mediate in peace talks.

In October, Amnesty International wrote a memorandum to Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, the presidential candidate for the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), who took office in December, expressing its concerns about the human rights situation in Mexico, and Chiapas in particular. The memorandum includes more than 70 recommendations, particularly an urgent call for an end to the impunity benefitting the perpetrators of abuses, in Chiapas and other regions of Mexico.

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INDONESIA AND EAST TIMOR: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT TO IMPLEMENT UN EXPERT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International today urged the Indonesian Government to act now on the United Nations' (UN) expert's recommendations to investigate the killings and "disappearances" in the Santa Cruz massacre in East Timor in 1991 and prosecute those suspected of human rights violations.

The report, released publicly last week, by the UN's Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions finds that members of the Indonesian security forces were responsible for killings in the massacre.

The report's recommendations include holding an impartial and thorough investigation into the killings, and setting up a separate human rights investigation body to look into continuing allegations of human rights violations in East Timor.

"If the government doesn't act immediately on these recommendations, their public pronouncements on human rights protection will be exposed as mere rhetoric," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization is also calling upon the Indonesian Government to present to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, at its meeting in Geneva from January to March 1995, full information on the steps it is taking to ensure that these recommendations are fully implemented in law and in practice without delay.

While the Indonesian Government has claimed that the actions of the armed forces at Santa Cruz were a spontaneous reaction to a riotous mob, the report concludes that regular members of Indonesia's armed forces were responsible for killing peaceful demonstrators.

The report states that the shooting of the demonstrators was "a planned military operation designed to deal with a public expression of political dissent in a way not in accordance with international human rights standards".

The report also criticises the competence, independence and thoroughness of the Indonesian Government's investigations into the killings and concludes that the government has failed to clarify satisfactorily the fate of those killed and "disappeared" during the massacre.

Echoing the findings of many international organisations including Amnesty International, the report highlights the fact that Indonesia's security forces can act with virtual impunity. According to the Special Rapporteur,

the "conditions that allowed the Santa Cruz killings to occur are still present. In particular, the members of the security forces responsible for the abuses have not been held accountable and continue to enjoy virtual impunity".

Members of the security forces who were prosecuted after the Santa Cruz massacre received sentences ranging from eight to 18 months imprisonment, in sharp contrast to civilians involved in peaceful protest during and after the massacre who were sentenced to up to life imprisonment. The Special Rapporteur has stated that "this disparity is much more illustrative of an implacable determination to suppress political dissent than a genuine commitment to protect the right to life and prevent extrajudicial executions".

Since the events of November 1991, the Special Rapporteur has continued to receive allegations of political killing and "disappearance".

The Indonesian Government denied the Special Rapporteur permission to visit some regions of Indonesia such as Aceh and Irian Jaya. Amnesty International, which has reported on political killing and "disappearance" from these and other areas of Indonesia not experiencing civil conflict, is calling on the government to invite the Special Rapporteur to carry out on-site investigations in these regions.

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