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## **Political violence should not mark Guatemala electoral campaign**

Guatemalan authorities must promptly and fully investigate a series of alleged politically motivated killings, Amnesty International said today after the latest shooting of a mayoral candidate near the capital.

Enrique Dardón was shot dead yesterday at point blank range in a barber shop in Guatemala City.

He was standing for mayor of San José Pinula, in Guatemala City, and he is the third political candidate to be killed since May, when campaigning began for presidential and general elections in September.

“The increase in politically related violence in the run-up to elections is a consequence of the state’s failure to tackle the persistent problem of impunity.” said Sebastian Elgueta, Central America Researcher at Amnesty International.

“The authorities must send a clear message that political violence will not be tolerated, by promptly identifying all those responsible and bringing them to justice in fair trials that meet international standards.”

Augusto Ovalle Barrera, a doctor who was also running for mayor of San José Pinula, was shot dead last Saturday along with two of his assistants.

On 8 May, Darwin Gallardo, who was running as a candidate for mayor in Atescatempa, Jutiapa, was shot dead outside his office.

The Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office reports that from January to May 2011 there were 20 killings related to political violence and 15 people were injured.

Amnesty International also condemned politically motivated violence during Guatemala’s 2007 electoral campaign.

“The reported increase in political violence bodes ill for the overall protection of human rights in Guatemala, in particular during the next months of political campaigning,” said Sebastian Elgueta.

“Regardless of party or platform, all of Guatemala’s political candidates should be able to campaign free from fears about their safety, and the authorities must act to ensure violence is eliminated from political campaigning.”