

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Guatemala: Evictions are not the answer to land conflicts**

(Guatemala City) In a new report published today, Amnesty International urged the Guatemala authorities to stop evictions of rural communities until the present legislation and practices, which are fundamentally unfair, biased and flawed, are overhauled.

Amnesty International's report looks at the human rights violations committed in the context of agrarian disputes, the impact of forced violent evictions and the discrimination suffered by rural workers and indigenous peoples -- present in all aspects of the process.

"While washing their hands of responsibility for the rights of rural workers and indigenous peoples, the authorities are quick to respond forcefully when it comes to the demands of the wealthy landowners." said Javier Zuñiga, Director of the Americas Programme at Amnesty International.

"Since coming to office in 2004, President Berger has accelerated evictions and ignored the consequent human right abuses. Destruction of homes, violations of due process, even killings, have been carried out with impunity," said Javier Zuñiga.

Land disputes emerge when peasants occupy land as a way of protest to demand fulfilment of their labour rights or when questions arise regarding the ownership of land.

According to governmental figures, 1052 cases of agrarian disputes remained unsolved in December 2005 – up from the 911 cases in October 2004.

Amnesty International report includes a number of case studies.

In 2004, 90 indigenous Q'eqchi families of rural workers, of Trece Aguas farm, were made homeless after refusing to leave land they considered a just compensation for what they were owed for redundancies.

They were forcefully and violently evicted and are presently still awaiting their compensation payments.

The Trece Aguas farm -- located in the Alta Verapaz department, north Guatemala -- was a major employer of rural workers for the production of coffee. When the price of coffee collapsed, the rural workers were the first to suffer.

Amnesty International's report also documents similar cases in other areas of Guatemala. For example,

also in Alta Verapaz, the small rural community of Santa Inés is currently facing a possible third eviction from an individual who claims ownership to the land. Despite several government agencies confirming that the community has a legitimate claim to the land an eviction order has been authorised. Several homes were destroyed during the previous two evictions.

Guatemala's Peace Accords of 1996 -- which ended 36 years of violent internal armed conflict -- included a governmental commitment to implement a series of concrete measures to solve the land crisis and ensure that rural workers and communities enjoy their human rights.

So far, none of those measures have been put in place.

Foreign governments, including Spain, Canada, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Japan and the US continue to give aid to the Guatemalan government to fund initiatives aimed at delivering the Peace Accords.

“By ignoring the commitments made in the Peace Accords, the Guatemalan authorities are missing a key opportunity to secure a long lasting solution to the land crisis,” said Javier Zuñiga.

### **Background information**

Amnesty International's report is based on information gathered by the organization during three research missions to Guatemala between 2004 and 2006.

**For a copy of the report “Guatemala: Land of injustice?”, please see:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR340032006>**

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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