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Mexico: Federal government must address Oaxaca's crisis

Amnesty International today urged Mexico's federal authorities to ensure authorities in Oaxaca prevent further violence in the state and investigate human rights violations committed by local militias reportedly backed by the security forces.

Protests calling for the resignation of Oaxaca's governor Ulises Ruíz Ortíz escalated in June 2006. Since 10 August, two people have been killed and many more injured. At least seven people are currently detained and seven have reported being tortured or otherwise ill treated.

Information received by Amnesty International shows strong evidence of human rights violations committed by armed militias operating in Oaxaca in conjunction with the state's security forces.

On 22 August, Lorenzo San Pablo, one of the protesters picketing a radio station, was shot in the back by unidentified individuals who were, according to witnesses, accompanying a police convoy. He died a few hours later.

On 10 August, Ramiro Aragón Pérez, a biologist, was detained together with two other activists and beaten by unidentified individuals travelling in vehicles without number plates. The three later reported they were taken to a secret location where they were tortured and handed over to the Office of the Attorney General in Oaxaca. Ramiro is still detained, facing the risk of torture.

"Illegal militias in Oaxaca are participating in the security forces' 'dirty work'. This needs to be urgently investigated, militias disarmed and disbanded and those responsible for human rights abuses, brought to justice," said Javier Zuñiga, Amnesty International's Americas Programme Director.

"Concrete actions must be urgently taken both to investigate recent abuses against demonstrators and to prevent more incidents from taking place. The federal government has the responsibility of ensuring authorities in Oaxaca act within the law," said Javier Zuñiga.

Amnesty International recognized the authorities' duty to ensure the safety and security of all in Oaxaca but highlighted that this must be done in accordance with international human rights legislation in order to ensure that people are able to exercise peacefully their rights to freedom of assembly and expression. Regrettably, the Oaxaca authorities have ignored repeated appeals to protect these rights.

"The current crisis in Oaxaca is the result of systematic failures and unwillingness to deal with the state's underlying problems and to protect people's most basic human rights."

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