

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Venezuela: Security for everybody during the referendum**

All parties involved in the political conflict in Venezuela must uphold the rule of law at all times if they are to construct a society where the rights of all are protected, said Amnesty International on the eve of the Referendum due to take place on Sunday 15 August.

The national referendum has been called to decide whether or not President Hugo Chávez should serve out the remaining two years of his six-year term.

Further street demonstrations by both pro and anti-government supporters are scheduled to take place in the run-up to the referendum.

Amnesty International is reiterating its call on all parties to ensure that the right to peaceful demonstration is respected and that international human rights standards are fully observed during policing operations.

"Over the last 15 years, the policing of public demonstrations has frequently resulted in human rights violations by the police and security forces. The authorities have consistently failed to investigate and punish officials responsible for abuses or effectively implement United Nations guidelines on the use of force or firearms," said Amnesty International.

"The impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators encourages further human rights violations in a particularly volatile political climate."

"While it is primarily the Government's responsibility to ensure the protection of human rights of all citizens, all social and political actors, whether opposition or government supporters, should avoid actions which could contribute to political violence and a deterioration in the human rights situation."

### **Background Information**

The Venezuelan constitution -- re-drafted in 1999 -- states that any elected official, including the president, can be subjected to a recall referendum after reaching the midway point of his or her term in office. Mr Chávez reached that point on 19 August 2003.

The recall referendum is set for Sunday 15 August. If the president loses the referendum, presidential elections will be held within one month.

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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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