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Honduras: Stock pile of tear gas grenades triggers fears of human rights abuses

Amnesty International has learned that the de facto authorities in Honduras have stock piled 10,000 tear gas cans and other crowd control equipment, triggering fears of an increased risk of excessive and disproportionate use of force by security forces around the presidential elections.

An Amnesty International delegation in Honduras to monitor the human rights situation around the presidential elections on 29 November received information of the recent official purchase of 10,000 tear gas grenades; 5,000 projectiles for tear gas grenades and a water spray tank, as well as the deployment of several thousands reservists.

“Since taking power, the de facto authorities have allowed the security forces to use tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to punish demonstrators in Honduras, causing several deaths and serious injuries, and nobody has been held responsible,” said Javier Zuniga, Head of Amnesty International’s delegation in Honduras.

“The past misuse of tear gas and other crowd control equipment, together with the lack of guarantees that the purchased equipment will not be used to attack demonstrators and the absence of investigations on past abuses paints an extremely worrying picture of what might happen over the next few days,” said Javier Zuniga.

It is not clear how this new equipment will be used or whether the security forces have received appropriate training or put the procedures in place to ensure that security operations in the context of possible demonstrations do not abuse human rights.

In July, Amnesty International visited a detention centre in Tegucigalpa and spoke to a number of demonstrators who were arbitrarily arrested and had been beaten and ill-treated. Amnesty International also denounced that human rights activists and journalists critical of the de facto authorities have been receiving increased threats and intimidation.

In a facsimile signed by the First Battalion of Communications, the Honduran Armed Forces requested a local mayor to provide a list of names and phone numbers of activist members of the Resistencia, a movement opposed to the de facto authorities.

“Today, there’s an environment of fear and intimidation in Honduras,” said Javier Zuniga. “We have seen an increased level of harassment against those who are seen as opposed to the de facto authorities and officials responsible for the protection of human rights are not doing anything to investigate the incidents or stop them.”

The Amnesty International delegation will be in Honduras until 4 December. They are meeting with victims of human rights violations, representatives of human rights organizations, journalists, teachers and doctors. Meetings have also being requested with prosecutors, the Army and the Police.