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@AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND HUMAN
RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Amnesty International (AI) is an international organization which has a specific mandate in the international protection of human rights:

- It seeks the release of prisoners of conscience:
- It works for fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners and on behalf of such people detained without charge or trial:
- It opposes the death penalty and torture or other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of all prisoners without reservation.

AI is currently considering ways in which it can contribute first to activities planned for 1992 to draw attention to human rights issues affecting indigenous peoples of the Americas, and then to the United Nations (UN) plans to call special attention to indigenous rights in 1993. It was in order to learn more about the concerns of indigenous people that an AI delegation followed with special interest the deliberations of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations held in Geneva in July, and it is to stimulate the organization's thinking further in this regard that AI is attending the continental gathering of indigenous people from both North and South America scheduled to take place in Guatemala in October.

Below, we cite some recent examples of actions AI has taken with respect to human rights violations suffered by indigenous peoples:

Recently, AI published materials concerning hundreds of people, many of them indigenous, who have been denied the protection of the law and deliberately killed by gunmen in the context of land disputes in Brazil. The organization has been concerned at overwhelming evidence that a landowners' campaign of intimidation and killing is not only sanctioned but frequently assisted by the Brazilian authorities.

In Mexico, the organization has reported on human rights violations carried out against the Triqui indigenous group of western Oaxaca. Abuses include murders carried out by the army, the police and hired gunmen; "disappearances"; torture; arbitrary arrests; maltreatment; rape and death threats.

In recent months, the organization has also repeatedly denounced abuses directed at indigenous people in Guatemala who have been subjected to torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial executions because of their efforts to protect indigenous rights there. The organization has also repeatedly publicized its concerns regarding Peru, where the military has been implicated in the torture--including rape--"disappearance" and murder of thousands of peasant farmers, many of them indigenous people. Governments of both countries have frequently justified such abuses as necessary to combat the armed insurgencies which they are facing. However, AI insists that a government retains its responsibility to uphold the law even in the face of violent opposition activity and domestic crises.

In Colombia too, in areas where guerrillas are active, the local population is reportedly often perceived by the armed forces as potential collaborators and has, as a result, been subjected to human rights violations. Community leaders have been particular targets. In March this year, AI called attention to its concerns regarding violations, including the arbitrary detention, abduction, torture and killing in November 1990 of Arhuaco indigenous leaders from the northern department of Magdalena. In July, the organization protested to the Ecuadorian authorities about the reported torture in June of José María Cabascango, secretary of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, by the Ecuadorian investigative police after he and other indigenous leaders were detained by the Ecuadorian army. The arrests took place as Cabascango was travelling to visit local indigenous communities in Imbabura province. During the last few years there have been numerous land conflicts in the province, and Amnesty has received reports of the killing, torture and harassment of many community members and leaders by paramilitary groups which appear to act with the direct cooperation or acquiescence of the government.

An AI delegation which visited Canada identified a number of allegations that Mohawk indigenous people had been ill-treated after their arrest by the Quebec police in August and September 1990 which it believed merited further investigation by the Canadian authorities. The arrests followed an armed confrontation related to a land dispute.

AI will continue to act on abuses within its mandate directed at indigenous communities of the Americas through appeals to the government's concerned, international publicity and world-wide membership activities. It is also actively seeking such materials as it prepares its 1992 and 1993 activities related to indigenous peoples. Information regarding the context in which such abuses occur, such as land disputes or civil conflict will also be helpful to help AI explain to its world-wide constituency the circumstances which give rise to such abuses.

Relavant written and audio-visual materials may be sent to Amnesty International's International Secretariat in London addressed to:

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