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BOLIVIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REQUESTS THE SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENCY
IN THE ALBARRACÍN CASE

Amnesty International has written to the President of the Republic of Bolivia, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, to request the support of the Bolivian Executive in guaranteeing an impartial investigation into the case of the well-known human rights defender Dr. Waldo Albarracín, who suffered a violent attack by individuals who may have been members of the National Police on 25 January in the city of La Paz.

According to information received by Amnesty International, an investigation into the case of Dr. Albarracín, president of the non-governmental Permanent Human Rights Assembly of Bolivia, has been opened by the Constitution, Justice and Judicial Police Commission of the Bolivian Honourable Chamber of Deputies.

In its letter to the Bolivian president, the human rights organization welcomes the initiative taken by the Commission to investigate this deplorable attack and stresses the importance of ensuring that the Commission receives "all necessary support from the Bolivian Executive to enable it fully to carry out its work without harassment or pressure of any kind, so as to allow it to complete the thorough, impartial and independent investigation to which it has committed itself."

"Moreover," said the organization, "although two members of the police have been identified as being among the group of individuals who attacked Waldo Albarracín, they both appear to have remained in active service."

Amnesty International also highlighted its concern at reports that the Albarracín family is receiving telephone threats and experiencing other forms of intimidation by unidentified individuals who are keeping some of the family members under surveillance.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about the significant impact that the attack on Dr. Albarracín and the threats against his family could have on the work of all human rights defenders in Bolivia. The organization urges the Bolivian authorities to offer all necessary protection to Waldo Albarracín and his family and calls for the complaints of harassment presented to the Commission by Waldo Albarracín to be duly investigated.

Background

On 25 January, in what appeared to be an abduction attempt, several individuals who may have been members of the police forced Dr. Waldo Albarracín out of the public transport vehicle in which he was travelling and subjected him to beatings, ill-treatment and death threats. Several hours later, Dr. Albarracín was left in a seriously injured state at the premises of the Technical Judicial Police. Due to the physical injuries sustained in the attack, he was obliged to stay in hospital until 8 February when he was discharged.

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