

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 18/007/2004 (Public)  
News Service No: 302  
30 November 2004

## **Bolivia: Justice is the only way out of the crisis**

*"I can't go on any more; for me, there is no justice"*

Vicenta de Colque, mother of Ana Colque, a nurse who died of gunshot wounds in La Paz, Bolivia, on 13 February.

These words reflect the anguish suffered today by thousands of Bolivian men and women due to judicial failures, Virginia Shoppée, Amnesty International researcher on Bolivia, said today, while presenting a new report on the human rights crisis sparked by the protests that took place during 2003.

Clashes between demonstrators and the security forces on the tragic days of February and October 2003 left more than a hundred dead and hundreds injured.

"The social conflicts of recent years have been generated by protests at the government's failure to comply with agreements on social and economic issues. It is unacceptable that the authorities do not promote solutions based on respect for fundamental rights and do not avoid the disproportionate use of force," said Ms Shoppée.

The Amnesty International report highlights the flaws in the investigations begun by the national authorities.

Amnesty International has noted the slow pace at which these investigations are progressing, the transfer to military courts of cases of civilians who lost their lives and the reported intention of prosecutors to close the files on the cases being investigated by civilian courts.

"The authorities must reject any support for solutions and measures that prevent the perpetrators of human rights violations being prosecuted, tried and punished, and that are incompatible with the international obligations contracted by the Bolivian state."

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has stated that "the duty to investigate must be undertaken in a serious manner and not as a mere formality preordained to be ineffective."

"The events of February and October left thousands of families devastated. The only way of preventing impunity from prevailing in Bolivia is for the civil justice system to proceed with independent and conclusive investigations," said Ms Shoppée. "It is incumbent on the State to prevent violations, investigate them, to prosecute and punish the perpetrators and to provide reparation for damages caused," stated Ms Shoppée.

In their response to the current crisis, it is vital that the Bolivian authorities recognise its roots in the violation of the economic, social and cultural rights of marginalized sectors of

the population. Equally, it is the duty of the authorities to take measures that promote an effective dialogue and permit the achievement of lasting solutions in critical situations such as those that developed in Bolivia last year.

In his inaugural speech, on 17 October 2003, President Carlos Mesa Gisbert declared that respect for life and human rights is " the most precious asset and gift of any citizen."

"It is of vital importance today that these words become reality and that the President reaffirms this commitment to human rights. It is essential for this administration to formulate policies and begin reforms that promote and protect human rights, restore confidence in Bolivian institutions and avoid a repetition of the bloody events of 2003 that plunged so many Bolivian homes into mourning."

### **General information**

The document presents information gathered by Amnesty International during two visits to the country, in March and November 2003, and in interviews that the organization's representatives conducted with social and human rights organizations, the families of victims and national government officials.

**For a copy of the report: "Bolivia: Crisis and Justice - days of violence in February and October 2003", please see:**  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR180062004>

Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

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>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>