

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index Number: AMR 53/017/2002 (Public)

News Service Number: 226

6 December 2002

## **Venezuela: Respect for human rights is fundamental to resolving the crisis**

"Respect for human rights is fundamental to generating a climate favourable to resolving the current crisis in Venezuela", the international human rights organization, Amnesty International affirmed yesterday.

The organization indicated its concern for the apparently excessive use of force by the National Guard (NG) in the area of Chuao, Caracas on 3 December, when the NG dispersed a demonstration by firing tear gas and pellets into the crowd. Journalists covering the incident were also reportedly physically assaulted. The NG operation left several people injured, including a number of journalists.

"The argument put forward by the authorities that the demonstration took place in a declared 'security zone' without proper authorization does not justify the violation of human rights by the NG," emphasized Amnesty International, which visited the country last month.

"It is extremely important that all enforcement officers comply with national and international standards on the use of force and firearms when attempting to maintain public order during demonstrations. It is essential that there is a swift, impartial and independent investigation into the conduct of the NG and that any NG members who are found to have violated these standards are identified and punished", stated Amnesty International.

Political polarization and instability have become more acute since the national civic strike called by the opposition on 2 December against the government of President Chávez, and during which some demonstrators reportedly committed acts of violence.

"Both the authorities and the opposition have the responsibility to ensure that the climate of tension and social breakdown does not worsen. Strict compliance with human rights and the rule of law, as guaranteed by the Constitution, is an essential condition for the resolution of the crisis."

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information, contact the press office at Amnesty International in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5562 Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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