

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 18/010/2003

UA 289/03 Fear for safety / Excessive use of force

14 October 2003

BOLIVIA Participants in mass demonstrations

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of demonstrators at mass protests around the country, following the apparent use of excessive force by the army and the police. Since 20 September, over 50 people, including three soldiers, have reportedly been killed and several hundred have been injured. The majority of the victims were reportedly shot. On 13 October, up to 14 people were killed in La Paz, and an undisclosed number were arrested.

Representatives of the Catholic Church and the non-governmental organization *Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos* (Human Rights Permanent Assembly) have criticized the use of fire arms and high calibre weapons by members of the security forces. Amnesty International recognizes the duty of the Bolivian authorities to uphold law and order. However, the organization condemns the use of excessive force and calls on the authorities to respect demonstrators' right to life in all circumstances.

The demonstrations are the largest series of protests against the administration of President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada who has been elected from 2002 until 2007. Demonstrations began in the highlands area (Altiplano) in mid-September and have mobilized peasants, trade unionists, and sectors of civil society in several cities, particularly in the area of el Alto, near the capital La Paz. Demonstrators are demanding social reforms and protesting against the exportation of Bolivia's natural gas. There have been also been calls for the President's resignation. Cabinet ministers have resigned and the Vice President Carlos Meza has withdrawn his support for the government, even though he is still in office.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish, English or your own language:

- recognizing the duty of the Bolivian authorities to maintain law and order but expressing serious concern for the safety of demonstrators at mass protests around the country, following the apparent use of excessive force by the security forces;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that the security forces comply with UN International standards including the 1979 UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the 1990 UN Basic Principles on the use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;
- asking for a thorough and independent investigation by ordinary courts into the deaths of over 50 people who were reportedly killed during demonstrations, as well as the injuries sustained by hundreds of others who were reportedly shot;
- asking the authorities to guarantee the safety of those in detention and for them to be granted access to lawyers, family members, and medical assistance if necessary;
- calling for the terms of the investigation and its outcome to be made public and for those found responsible be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Presidency, Justice and Human Rights
Sr. Ministro de la Presidencia e Interino de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Sr. Guillermo Justiniano
Palacio de Gobierno
Plaza Murillo s/n
La Paz, Bolivia

Telegrams: Minister of the Presidency, Justice and Human Rights, La Paz, Bolivia

Fax: + 591 2 22 03996

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Interior Minister

Sr. Ministro de Gobierno
Sr. Yerko Kukoc
Ministerio de Gobierno
Av. Arce No. 2409 esq. Belisario Salinas
La Paz, Bolivia

Telegrams: Interior Minister, La Paz, Bolivia

Fax: + 591 2 24 42589

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sr. Ministro de Relaciones
Exteriores y Culto
Sr. Carlos Saavedra Bruno
Ministerio de Relaciones
Exteriores y Culto
Plaza Murillo, c Ingavi esq. Junin
La Paz, Bolivia

Telegrams: Ministro Relaciones Exteriores

Fax: + 591 2 240 8915/ 211 2163/ 240 8293

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

President of the Republic

Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente de la República
Sr. Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada
Palacio de Gobierno
Plaza Murillo s/n
La Paz, Bolivia

Telegrams: Sr. Presidente de Bolivia, La Paz, Bolivia

Fax: + 591 22 2 04 213

Salutation: Sr. Presidente/ Mr. President

NGO

Human Rights Permanent Assembly

Asamblea Permanente
de Derechos Humanos de Bolivia
Av. 20 de Octubre N°2019
Edificio Jazmín Piso 2 Of. "b"
Casilla 9282^a, La Paz, Bolivia

Fax: + 591 2 2 440651 (if someone answers, say "linea de fax por favor")

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 November 2003.