

El Salvador: 10th anniversary of Peace Accords, still no justice for victims of human rights violations

Ten years on from the signing of the Peace Accords in El Salvador, those responsible for the massive human rights violations committed during the country's 11-year conflict are yet to be brought to justice, Amnesty International said today.

"This constitutes the most serious failure of the Accords since the issue of human rights was central to the peace process," the organization added.

Amnesty International stressed that -- although many of those responsible for massacres, extrajudicial executions, disappearances, death squad assassinations and murders of political opponents have been identified in the country's Truth Commission report -- any hopes for justice were obliterated by the approval of the General Amnesty Law only days after the publication of the Commission's report.

"This was the case with the massacre at El Mozote, where hundreds of people, most of them children, were killed just over 20 years ago -- a crime for which nobody has been held to account," Amnesty International said. "Despite decisions and recommendations made by international human rights bodies, the Salvadorean authorities continue seeking refuge under an amnesty law which denies victims and their relatives access to justice."

The Accords aimed to bring an end to the war, lay the institutional foundations for the future of the country, investigate past violations of human rights and ensure continued respect for them. They also provided, among other things, for the reform of institutions such as the armed forces, the judicial system and the security forces.

"Probably the highest degree of implementation has been reached with regards to the armed forces, which are no longer directly involved in public security and have been reduced in number to fit a peacetime situation," Amnesty International said.

"However, the judicial system still has a long way to go to fulfil its important tasks and provide fair and prompt justice to all," the organization added.

"As for the National Civil Police -- born of the dismantlement of the security forces, responsible for grave human rights violations -- it is certainly an improvement on its predecessor but it also has some way to go before becoming a force trusted by the population at large."

Amnesty International also urged the authorities to provide the necessary support to ensure the proper functioning of the Office of the Human Rights Procurator -- an institution seen as a cornerstone of the Accords and crucial for the development of Salvadorean society and respect for human rights which faced a serious crisis between 1998 and 2001 because of the politicization of the post and process to elect a Procurator.

"Despite some advances, more needs to be done to achieve the full implementation of the Peace Accords, and to turn over a new leaf in terms of respect for human rights in El Salvador," Amnesty International said.

"In particular, it is extremely worrying to see that -- 10 years after commitments made before the national and international community -- impunity still prevails in El Salvador for past human rights violations," the organization said. "Equally worrying are signs that this may become the norm for the present. Dealing with the past is an indispensable step for El Salvador to move forward into a future of true peace and unity," Amnesty International concluded.

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