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URUGUAY: THE VALUE OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE IS ESSENTIAL

Amnesty International today calls once again on the Uruguayan authorities to ensure that an in-depth investigation is carried out into the human rights violations which were committed under recent military governments.

"The organisation is pleased by the recent decision by Judge Alvaro Reyes to investigate the fate of several detainees who "disappeared", and who were reportedly buried at military barracks during the period 1973 to 1985," Amnesty International said today. " Relatives of the victims have an undeniable right to an in-depth investigation into the true fate of their loved ones".

In early 1996, former members of the Uruguayan armed forces stated that the deaths and "disappearances " which took place during the period 1973 to 1985 had been perpetrated by military personnel. On that occasion, Amnesty International urged the Uruguayan authorities to "recognise the truth in order to be able to overcome the past".

One year later, on 19 March this year, Senator Rafael Michelini presented a judicial report alleging that a retired general officer had informed him that "the detainees who disappeared in Uruguay died while undergoing interrogation in military units, [and that] subsequently the bodies of these individuals were secretly buried on military land".

Although the process of obtaining legal redress for these events was cut short in Uruguay by the approval in 1986 of the Expiry Act, Amnesty International calls once more on the Uruguayan authorities to comply with international human rights standards. It also calls for comprehensive, independent investigations to be carried out into all human rights violations which occurred under previous governments, and for those responsible to be prosecuted.

General Information

In December 1986, during the first government of President Julio Maria Sanguinetti, the Uruguayan Parliament passed the Expiry Act. This law exempted from punishment all military and police personnel responsible for human rights violations committed prior to 1 March 1985 if such acts were politically motivated or committed in fulfilment of orders. In April 1989, the electorate voted in a national referendum to retain the Expiry Act.

Under the Expiry Act, the government was responsible for administrative investigations into any "disappearances" which had occurred during the period of military rule. However, these investigations were assigned to military prosecutors, which raised serious doubts about their impartiality.

Amnesty International repeatedly has raised concern over the Expiry Act's failure to provide any guarantees that comprehensive, independent and impartial investigations will be carried out into the human rights violations of the past. The organization believes that this Act is an insult to the victims and their families. In fact, the Expiry Act has deprived the latter of a legal means of ascertaining the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones.

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