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BOLIVIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FOCUSES THE ATTENTION OF THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS ON UNFULFILLED HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS

Amnesty International today reminded heads of state and government leaders meeting in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, of the commitment to promote and protect human rights made by representatives of their countries at the first Summit of the Americas in Miami two years ago.

According to the human rights organization, "practically none of the countries which signed the Miami Action Plan has shown the clear political will to move ahead with the reforms announced at the last summit. As far as human rights are concerned, the Action Plan has remained a dead letter."

"Torture and extrajudicial executions have continued over the last two years in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico, while the lack of respect for due process still features practically throughout the whole continent, and to a particularly serious extent in Colombia, Guatemala, Peru and Venezuela. In the United States of America, the authorities have failed to put an end to the problem of ill-treatment of detainees."

"A dramatic example of the lack of seriousness of certain governments can be seen in Venezuela. Two years ago the Venezuelan government made a commitment to train its agents in the proper treatment of suspects and detainees, as well as to tackle inhumane prison conditions and reduce the number of detainees awaiting trial. Last October the whole world witnessed the death of 25 inmates of Carcel de la Planta, several still awaiting trial, as a result of criminal action by members of the National Guard."

In Mexico, despite the fact that the June 1995 massacre in the state of Guerrero aroused indignation both within and outside the country, the human rights situation has deteriorated. Amnesty International considers that a pattern of widespread human rights abuses, such as can be seen in Mexico and other countries of the region, exists thanks to the impunity enjoyed by those responsible for these violations.

While governments limit themselves to making rhetorical statements, those who truly dedicate themselves to the promotion and protection of human rights -- human rights defenders -- continually face obstacles in carrying out their work. In several countries of the continent, such as Colombia and Mexico, they are the object of constant persecution by agents of the state.

"The persecution of human rights defenders demonstrates a total absence of political will to give substance to what have up to now been nothing more than high-level statements, with no impact at the level of the citizen. Amnesty International urges the governments meeting in Santa Cruz to adopt a committed approach to the support and protection of these individuals," the organization said.

In 1994, Amnesty International sent the representatives to the Summit of the Americas a 10-point program for the free and full enjoyment of human rights. The organization today emphatically reiterated the need to adopt and implement this program.

The program's recommendations to governments include:

- prevent torture, “disappearances” and extrajudicial executions by government agents and compensate the victims;
- release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally;
- ensure prompt and fair trials for all political prisoners;
- end impunity for those responsible for human rights violations;
- protect the victims and witnesses of human rights violations.

In 1994, all governments represented at the Miami Summit stated their intention to adhere to regional and international human rights instruments. Amnesty International is stressing the importance for all countries of the continent to accede to the Inter-American Convention on the Forced Disappearance of Persons, which has not yet been signed by Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, the United States of America and most Caribbean countries.

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