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PRESS RELEASE

Venezuela: Repression taken into people's living rooms as home raids surge

The Venezuelan authorities have expanded their arsenal of repressive tactics by launching a vicious campaign of illegal home raids on citizens suspected of dissent, Amnesty International said in a new investigation published today.

Nights of terror: Attacks and illegal raids on homes in Venezuela reveals how Venezuelan security forces and government-sponsored civilian armed groups have violently broken into people's homes in recent months as a way of intimidating them against taking part in demonstrations or any other form of protest.

"In Venezuela, no place is safe from the twisted power of the security forces. Not even people's homes," said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International.

"The Venezuelan authorities have found a new and disturbing way of stamping out dissent as part of a seemingly endless quest to instill fear into the population. They have taken street repression into people's living rooms."

"People have the right to feel safe in their own homes."

Local human rights organizations have collected reports of at least 47 illegal home raids in 11 districts across the country between April and July 2017 – when demonstrations were at their height. More than 120 people were killed, nearly 2,000 were injured and more than 5,000 were arrested during this period.

Amnesty International experts visited and interviewed victims of home raids in four Venezuelan states: Caracas, Miranda, Carabobo and Lara.

Those targeted said security forces and armed men, believed to be members of government-sponsored illegal armed groups, would violently force their way into their homes without judicial orders or any explanation of why they were there.

These raids would often involve threats, and verbal and physical violence, including the use of anti-riot gear and the firing of gas canisters inside apartments.

A woman who was living in an apartment block in Miranda state, north Venezuela, told Amnesty International that during a home raid on 22 May 2017 she could hear men screaming: "Open up, open up ... the boogeyman is here."

Victims also reported that security forces broke down doors, smashed windows and, in some cases, stole objects from their homes. In one apartment block in Miranda, CCTV cameras

caught members of the security forces leaving with heavy bags, presumably with stolen objects.

Raids would last for hours and, in some cases, the whole night.

Once inside the apartments, security forces would ask for the location of the “young men who were protesting”. Many young man were rounded up and massive arbitrary detentions took place.

A man from the state of Lara, northern Venezuela, said that security forces would enter shouting “come down now fucking bandits ... we are going to rape you all.”

Several victims told Amnesty International they are frightened another raid could take place at their home at any moment and have trouble sleeping at night.

Due to the chronic shortage of goods in Venezuela, some have not been able to repair the damage caused by the raid and now live in highly insecure homes without doors.

“These home raids are absolutely illegal under international law and Venezuela’s own constitution,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas.

“It is time for the Maduro administration and its security forces to stop employing violence and repression against its people. These types of violations cannot continue in the future and there must be justice for the victims to ensure this policy of violence comes to an end.”

“By continuing this repression, instead of investigating and punishing those responsible for these acts, the authorities are sending a frightening message: anyone could be repressed at any moment and in any place, no matter their political beliefs.”

Read More:

Nights of terror: Attacks and illegal raids on homes in Venezuela (Report, 30 October 2017)
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/7285/2017/en/>

Venezuela: Lethal violence, a state policy to strangle dissent (News, 10 July 2017)
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/07/venezuela-violencia-letal-una-politica-de-estado-para-asfixiar-a-la-disidencia/>

Venezuela: Wave of arrests as government turns against elected opposition (News, 11 August 2017)
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/08/venezuela-wave-of-arrests-as-government-turns-against-elected-opposition/>

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