

Amnesty International says 2019 was marked by repression in Latin America



London, February 29 (RHC)-- Amnesty International has described Latin America in its 2019 annual report as a region where citizens were attacked for protesting and defending human and environmental rights, with governments often using measures in "flagrant disregard for their obligations under domestic and international law."

The text depicts the regional scenario marked by states' inability to channel people's discontent and demands for their rights. Instead, they resorted to repression and excessive use of force, including intentionally lethal force.

For instance, in Chile, the army and police were found to deliberately injure protesters taking part in nationwide demonstrations against inequality. "Main cities have been filled with tear gas as state forces cracked down on protesters. Widespread abuses have taken place at the hands of the state, from excessive force to alleged sexual violence," it reads.

The human rights organizations also condemned the U.S. government's aggressive stances against migrants and asylum seekers. They called Donald Trump's asylum ban, issued in July, a "death sentence"

for people seeking safety, especially for children fleeing situations of violence in Central America.

Under the Trump administration's migration policies, tens of thousands of asylum seekers have been forced back to Mexico to wait out their cases in the U.S. Hundreds of Salvadorans and Hondurans have been sent to Guatemala to apply for asylum there instead, despite warnings from rights group who say the Central American country is not equipped to handle asylum seekers.

Amnesty International also acknowledged that 2019 saw the growing strength of diverse women's movements across the region. In Mexico, a string of sexual violence cases sparked outrage and protests across the country, while in Argentina, thousands of women took to the streets over abortion rights, the group said.

Back in Chile, feminist group Las Tesis created the chant "A Rapist in Your Path." The song, which highlights patriarchal culture as the root causes of violence against women, quickly became a feminist anthem repeated by women across the world.

"There has certainly been a worrying shift towards repressive tactics from security forces, and with few elections coming up in 2020 there is little reason to expect these approaches to change," said Asa Cusack, managing editor of the London School of Economics' Latin America and Caribbean blog, and associate fellow of the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London.

"But in the past, the region's remarkably strong and effective social movements have been able to raise awareness and bring about real change all across Latin America and the Caribbean. Though things might get worse before they get better, this long history of activism at least gives people the tools to clear a path away from the current turmoil."

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