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LADB Staff

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## President Maduro Promises Action

by LADB Staff

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The Honduran government on Oct. 4 gave official recognition to charges that authorities were involved in executing children, as had been charged by human rights organizations. Minister of Government Jorge Hernandez Alcerro said that a report by a commission investigating the killing of children indicated that "some authorities" could be "involved" in the murders. "We have a problem in the country in relation to the violent deaths of children, not in the proportion that has been said before, possibly because we studied those cases between zero and 18 years of age." Others had counted youths up to the age of 23.

The minister didn't give details of the report pending its presentation to President Ricardo Maduro, who would decide "the course of action to investigate those cases." Maduro created a commission to investigate complaints from organizations, among them Casa Alianza, (see NotiCen, 2001-08-23), the Public Ministry, and the human rights commission, about executions of children, many of whom were "presumed delinquents," in the last four years. Information about the killings had also reached the UN, where Human Rights Relator Asma Jahangir presented a report the first week in October revealing that "the forces of security" of Honduras "are killing children without fear of punishment and the government is doing very little to stop them."

Jahangir's report follows an investigation done in 2001 and points out that, during her visit to Honduras last year, she found an environment in which children could be murdered with impunity. Between January 1998 and August 2002, Casa Alianza counted 1,400 murders of children and youths under 23 years of age. During that time, then human rights commissioner Leo Valladares denounced the killing of 1,600 youths, most between 21 and 23 years old, during a five-year period. The Valladares report stated that 52% of the cases involved unknown assailants, 32% were at the hands of armed gangs, 8% by private parties, 5% by police, and 1% by other agents of the state.

During the first week of October, Maria Luisa Borjas, chief of the office of internal affairs of the Ministry of Security, reported that authorities of that institution and of the Policia Preventiva were implicated in the execution of at least 20 people. Borjas is in process of being fired from her job, according to Minister of Security Oscar Alvarez, for having violated the internal law of the police. The Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Interna, CONASIN, considered that her report, which was not denied by the Security Ministry, was most important, and recommended that she remain in her post and continue her investigation. Borjas has reportedly received death threats.

### *Maduro acts to protect children*

On Oct. 7, President Maduro, responding to the report he received, promised to appoint a commission to "reduce in the least time possible" the executions of minors. The report documented 574 killings, but attributed only 4% to the police. The report was prepared by the Comision de Proteccion a la Integridad Fisica y Moral de la Ninez, composed of the Ministers of Security

Alvarez and of Government Hernandez Alcerro, human rights commissioner Ramon Custodio, Attorney General Roy Medina, and representatives of Casa Alianza. The report was based on four others from the Fiscalia, the National Human Rights Commission, Casa Alianza, and from JAJA, a nongovernmental organization (NGO).

The aggregate report said that, "from 1998 until June 30 of this year, 574 cases were reported of deaths of youths up to 18 years of age. Of those, 55 occurred in 1998, 67 in 1999, 36 in 2000, 276 in 2001, and 140 so far this year. Maduro characterized these as "real statistics that permit objective appreciation of the problem in order to undertake pertinent actions and start the necessary mechanisms for an effective investigation of those responsible for these crimes, and their delivery to the authorities." He noted that a constant in the crimes was that the bodies were found in secluded places in the inner cities, with very little evidence, "like a scarcity of blood that suggests that the place of the commission of the crime is different from the place where the body was found. Some of these executions were committed from vehicles using automatic weapons." Most of the murders occurred in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, a few in La Ceiba and Choluteca.

Maduro noted that it would be difficult to determine whether state agents had committed the crimes because of the lack of evidence and witnesses. Of the cases reported to have happened in the first six months of 2002, there are no suspects in 64% of them, 4% are thought to have been committed by police, 16% by gangs, and 16% by individuals. Of the victims, 63% were between 17 and 18 years old, 27% between 15 and 16, and the rest, 14 years old or less. Eighty-eight percent were male, 12% female.

Maduro said that the investigation "will have the full support of the government as far as resources are concerned to continue with the investigations and necessary analysis to reduce in the least possible time the incidence of this kind of death." He added that the highest priority would be given to those cases where state agents were implicated because in those the credibility of the security forces was at stake. The minister of security took the opportunity to announce that "we already have the first arrest in a case that was presented by an NGO, which happened in 2000, and in which an ex-policeman is involved."

The minister of government, meanwhile, announced that the commission did not investigate any of the cases revealed by Maria Luisa Borjas, because "I really don't know of any list drawn up by chief Borjas. Maduro concluded by promising that "no security agent will be tolerated who turns out to be involved in these cases."

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