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Amidst the celebrations and protests of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing in the Americas, London-based human rights organization Amnesty International (AI) issued a report titled "The Americas: Human Rights Violations Against Indigenous Peoples." The 114-page report accuses numerous Latin American governments of complicity in human rights violations committed against indigenous populations. "For centuries, governments have often treated the rights of indigenous people with contempt torturing, 'disappearing,' and killing them by the tens of thousands and doing virtually nothing when others murder them," said the report. "Disputes over land and resources are often at the root of many of the human rights abuses against indigenous people...Thousands have also died, 'disappeared' or been tortured when they've been caught in the middle of the 'war on drugs' or civil conflicts." Attacks against indigenous have resulted from land disputes with the government, private companies, or settlers seeking land for mining, logging or farming and ranching. In Brazil alone, dozens of indians have been killed in land disputes while the murderers have gone unpunished by the state. According to AI, some of the worst abuses have taken place during armed conflicts in countries like Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru. In Peru, thousands of indigenous have been tortured and killed by both sides in the conflict between the government and Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) rebels. Anti-drug campaigns by Latin American governments have also subjected indigenous populations to human rights abuses, particularly in Bolivia and Peru. In contrast to the impunity enjoyed by those who have committed abuses against indigenous persons, when indigenous have been charged with crimes, the accused are often subject to arbitrary detention, mistreatment and unfair trials, according to the AI report. The report concluded that indigenous people across the Americas are becoming increasingly active in efforts to defend their rights. "From the local to the international level, the message is that the centuries of violating the rights of the region's original inhabitants must end once and for all." For 1993, designated International Year for Indigenous Populations by the United Nations, AI called for all governments to establish commissions to review the national record in implementing international human rights conventions for their indigenous peoples. (Sources: Inter Press Agency, Agence France-Presse, 10/06/92)

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