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## **Americas Watch: Unsettling Tolerance For Human Rights Abuses In Peru**

*by John Neagle*

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According to an annual report on Peru by Americas Watch released Oct. 29, the Peruvian government exhibits an unsettling tolerance of human rights abuses. The report focused on the difficulties faced by democratic institutions in Peru, rights abuses by armed rebel groups, government strategies for coping with the insurgency, and human rights violations observed in 1987 and 1988. Unfortunately, said the report, during the three years of President Alan Garcia's administration there have been no fundamental improvements in the human rights situation. The most disappointing finding, said Americas Watch, was its confirmation of the government's attitude regarding human rights which has in fact undergone a negative change relative to the policy initiated in 1985. Additional highlights of the report are summarized below. \* In 1986 and 1987, in the midst of both positive and negative human rights developments, Americas Watch detected a certain passivity on the part of the government in relation to violations. In 1988, this passivity has been transformed into a type of resignation to human rights abuses which the government perceives as inevitable. \* Since 1980, thousands of Peruvians have been victimized by political violence. Alongwith Colombia, Peru has the dubious distinction of being one of the most dangerous and violent places in South America. \* Extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, disappearances and torture continue. Such practices are not exceptions or mistakes on the part of government security forces engaged in the struggle against the armed rebels. Instead, these practices are central characteristics of that struggle. \* Notable is the absence of legislative, executive and judicial supervision and decisionmaking regarding the counterinsurgency program. In Peru, there is no integrated counterinsurgency strategy, resulting in the absence of substantive coordination among various agencies involved in the struggle against subversion. Consequently, the failure of Peru's counterinsurgency strategy is not surprising. \* Sendero Luminoso, the most important of Peru's rebel organizations, has achieved a higher profile in the past three years, via an escalation in terrorist actions and mass murders. According to Americas Watch, Sendero Luminoso's "progress" is the logical outcome of the continuity of official policy which fails to prioritize human rights as part of a model for reducing social conflict. \* The military's form of "justice" continues to function as a pretext for all members of the armed forces who commit human rights abuses to act with impunity. This situation has accentuated the image of the judiciary as incompetent and ineffective in applying sanctions to persons responsible for terrorist acts and to those who abuse their authority. In such an environment, Sendero Luminoso has been able to use assassination and violence as part of its rules of war to affirm their convictions and agenda. \* The Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement is described as a force promoting violence that without the aggressiveness and dogmatism of Sendero Luminoso has committed serious violations against the rights of persons and the rules of war. Americas Watch, headquartered in Washington, is an organization which promotes respect for human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean. (Basic data from AFP, 10/29/88)

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