



12.13.2011

PERU Breakthrough in Putis massacre case after 27 years

On the 27th anniversary of the Putis massacre in Peru, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that the Ayacucho public prosecutor has filed charges against four high ranking military officials who were in command of military operations in the region at the time.

On December 13, 1984, 123 villagers, including babies and the elderly were gunned down by members of the Peruvian military, who had tricked them into thinking they were helping them. Many of the young women were gang-raped before their murder. The predominantly Christian villagers had sought the military's protection after their mayor was assassinated by the extreme leftist Shining Path, which often specifically targeted Christians and church leaders. No one has ever been held to account and the military and Ministry of Defense refused to turn over records of who was stationed there at the time to the prosecutors' office.

The bodies lay untouched for 23 years before the Ayacucho public prosecutor at the time, Dr. Cristina Olazabal, opened an investigation with help from the organization Peace and Hope, and oversaw the exhumation of the bodies in 2007. As many bodies as possible were identified through DNA tests and given to the closest surviving relatives for burial, however in cases where entire families were wiped out and identification was not possible, they were buried in a special graveyard in Putis with the help of Peace and Hope.

Peru was wracked by an internal conflict from 1980-2000 as government forces battled two extreme left guerrilla groups, the Shining Path and the MRTA. The Shining Path was militantly anti-religion and was responsible for targeted persecution of Christians. The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that the conflict claimed at least 70,000 lives. The Shining Path was responsible for the majority of these deaths, but government forces were also responsible for a significant percentage, and both sides are responsible for human rights atrocities and crimes against humanity. There are an estimated 1,000 mass graves as a result of the conflict, and the majority have not been exhumed. Putis is one of the most significant because of its size.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW welcomes the progress in the search for justice in the Putis case. It is a sad fact that a number of victims of the internal conflict in the 1980s and 1990s have passed away without ever seeing justice, due to the obstruction of investigations by the military and some government bodies. We congratulate the Ayacucho prosecutor's office on this important step and continue to call on the national government to implement the recommendations of the 2003 report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in full, to co-operate fully with investigators and take concrete steps to end the culture of impunity."

Notes to Editors:

1. For more information, please read CSW's report on Peru, "[Progress in the Implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Recommendations.](#)"