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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN PERU

ISSUE

Respect for human rights was not a strong feature of Peruvian life in 1992. Violence against individuals was the most spectacular infringement, while ethnic and economic discrimination were also very widespread. There were also numerous attacks on civil rights and democratic institutions.

However, one must consider the country's widespread climate of violence before attempting to determine what the future of human rights will be in Peru.

BACKGROUND

The highlight of 1992 was without question the self-inflicted coup d'état (autogolpe) in which President Fujimori took over from himself. In so doing, he abolished the Congress, which was elected when he was, in July 1990, and threw out most of the magistracy. Civil liberties were suspended for about 10 days.

Fujimori had two arguments to justify his action. To begin with, he felt that the corruption of the ruling class and of the judicial system must end. He also wished to put an end to the activities of the terrorist Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and the Shining Path.

International opinion forced the President to prepare a timetable for a return to democracy. National elections for the selection of a constituent assembly on November 22 marked the first step in this direction. National municipal elections were announced for this coming January 23.

Although it is still too early to celebrate a return to democracy in Peru, the acceptable standards were followed in the elections of November 22, which were observed by teams from the OAS, among them an official delegation of 13 Canadians.

Both the terrorist movements and the forces of law and order continue to make a mockery of human rights in Peru, however. A curfew was imposed in Lima from April to December. This has not prevented attacks on ordinary citizens, without regard to class or ethnic origin, from occurring on an unprecedented scale. In September, the police dealt a severe blow to terrorism by arresting Abimael Guzman, leader of the Shining Path. He was tried and sentenced by a military tribunal, composed of anonymous judges (to avoid reprisals). Although the Government can justifiably proclaim at least a partial victory in its