

PUBLIC
18/001/2009

AI Index: AMR

05 March 2009

UA 59/09
BOLIVIA

Fear for safety

Miguel Esteben González Bonilla (m), regional director of the Centre for Legal Studies and Social Research (*Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social*, CEJIS)

On 27 February, a work vehicle being driven by Miguel González was shot at by two men on a motorcycle. The shot narrowly missed him. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for his safety.

Miguel González works for the *Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social* (CEJIS), which promotes the rights of Indigenous and peasant communities, including assisting communities in claiming their communal land rights. Miguel González is the regional director of the CEJIS office in the town of Trinidad, capital of Beni department, in the north of Bolivia.

Miguel González had been followed three days earlier on 24 February. He was followed first by a red and silver van with tinted windows and then a motorcycle. As he drove towards his house on the outskirts of the town, he noticed the van following him. The van flashed at him as if he wanted to overtake. However, when he stopped to let the van pass, it stayed behind him. The van then made a turn in front of Miguel González who turned in the opposite direction and noticed he was still being followed by a motorcycle. When the motorcycle had to give up the pursuit due to the difficult terrain the rider shouted insults at him.

On several occasions unidentified individuals have called at Miguel González' home asking his family members for his whereabouts. Following the recent attack Miguel González filed a complaint with both the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office in Trinidad. However, so far no protection has been provided. Fearing for their safety, he and his family have left their home in Trinidad to go into hiding.

The latest attack comes after a series of acts of intimidation against CEJIS staff in Trinidad. In August 2008 armed motorcyclists turned up at the CEJIS offices waiting for staff members to arrive. Fortunately, staff were warned by a neighbour. Days later, at the beginning of September 2008, members of the opposition Union of Beni Youth (*Unión Juvenil Benianista*), attempted to seize CEJIS' offices in Trinidad during a campaign of seizures of government and private institutions. However, on this occasion the gangs of youths were unable to locate the CEJIS offices or members of staff. During this period of violence CEJIS staff worked from home in fear for their safety. Numerous staff members have also reported receiving threats and insults as a result of their work. Following this incident, in September, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted precautionary measures ordering the protection of CEJIS members of staff in Trinidad. However, no protection was provided by the authorities and it was not until January 2009 that the police visited the CEJIS offices to follow up on their security situation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Attacks against CEJIS have threatened their work for many years. Other CEJIS offices have also been subjected to threats and harassment as a result of their work. On 9 September 2008, in the city of Santa Cruz in eastern Bolivia, the CEJIS headquarters were seized and looted by university students and members of the opposition Union of Santa Cruz Youth. Their offices were broken into, equipment and furniture destroyed and 30 years of CEJIS records and files looted and burnt. Two other NGOs that promote the rights of indigenous and peasant communities, local branches of government offices and two media outlets were also targeted.

Racially-motivated attacks on organizations and individuals working for the rights of Bolivia's Indigenous Peoples and peasant farmers (campesinos) and advocates of land reform have been common in Bolivia. In a recent report the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples expressed concern about persistent racism in Bolivia. He observed that racist discourse, employed by some political parties, regional government officials and civic committee pressure groups and disseminated by some media outlets, was affecting Indigenous Peoples at all levels of society. Among the articles of the new constitution are provisions to enhance the political rights of Bolivia's Indigenous Peoples who have been excluded from effective decision-making. As well as guaranteeing the sanctity of private and state property it also guarantees communal property.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Miguel González and other members of CEJIS;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective action to protect Miguel González and members of CEJIS, in line with the precautionary measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, so that they can perform their legitimate work without fear of attack or harassment;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the attack against Miguel González, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Beni District Public Prosecutor

Ministerio Público

Fiscalía de Distrito de Beni

Dr. Gilberto Adad Suárez

Fiscal de Distrito

La Paz N° 131, Trinidad, Departamento de Beni, Bolivia.

Fax: + 591 3 4622420

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal Distrital / Dear District Prosecutor

Beni Authority

Sr. Prefecto del Departamento del Beni

Ernesto Suárez

Plaza Ballivián acera Sur s/n, Trinidad, Departamento de Beni, Bolivia.

Fax: +591 3 4652157 / 4620200 / 4627069 / 4624830

Salutation: Sr. Prefecto / Dear Prefect

COPIES TO:

NGO

CEJIS - Trinidad

Avenida Dorado, No. 88,

Trinidad, departamento de Beni, Bolivia

Fax: + 591 3 4622976 (if someone answers say 'tono de fax por favor', a request to be put through to the tax tone)

and to diplomatic representatives of Bolivia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 April.