

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/Excessive use of force

14 June 2006

MEXICO

**Teachers and members of the Teachers' Union *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* (SNTE), Oaxaca sector (*magisterial*)
Their families**

At approximately 5am on 14 June, Oaxaca State police entered the central square in Oaxaca City to evict striking teachers. Protesters reportedly resisted the police operation in which tear gas and batons were used. At least 11 teachers were reportedly detained and a number have been injured. Unconfirmed reports indicate that at least one teacher may have died.

Amnesty International is concerned that future police operations may result in serious human rights violations and may place at serious risk many of children and minors who are accompanying their parents in the street occupation.

The striking teachers occupied the main square and surrounding streets about 23 days ago, demanding improved pay and conditions. Negotiations with the state government broke down, when the government refused to meet teachers demands. The state government has repeatedly threatened to remove the striking teachers in order to force them back to school and safeguard the commercial interests of shops and restaurants which have been directly affected by ongoing mass protest in the streets of Oaxaca.

During the police operation at least 4 police officers were held by the protesters before being released. An unknown number of protesters and police have reportedly received medical attention in a local hospital. The state government has requested support from Federal Preventive Police in order end the protest.

Amnesty International delegates visited Oaxaca City at the beginning of June 2006 during a research mission to Mexico and called on authorities to ensure that any police operations against protesters respected international human rights standards, particularly the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials. On a number of occasions in the past, Amnesty International has documented incidences when state police have reportedly used excessive force to evict and arrest protesters from the streets of Oaxaca, as well as fabricated criminal charges against protesters in order to deter social protests.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 4 May 2006, State of Mexico police and Federal Preventive Police entered the town of San Salvador Atenco in order to release police who had been held captive by members of the community after a protest the day before ended in violence. At least 205 people were detained, many suffering severe beatings. When transported to prison, those detained reported suffering torture, including the rape and sexual assault of at least 23 of the women arrested. Investigations into the police operation are still ongoing. Amnesty International is concerned that a police operation against striking teachers in Oaxaca may result in similar human rights abuses.

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

- expressing concern that the police reportedly use tear gas and batons against striking teachers in the centre of Oaxaca City on 14 June 2006, injuring many and reportedly killing at least one of the teachers;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that the police do not use excessive force against the striking teachers;
- calling on the authorities the guarantee the safety of all children and minors present and ensure that police strictly abide by the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials;

- recognising the obligation of the authorities to maintain public order while respecting the right to peaceful protest;
- calling for any allegations of human rights violations to be investigated promptly and impartially.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Oaxaca

Ulises Ruiz Ortiz

Gobernador del Estado de Oaxaca

Carretera Oaxaca-Puerto Angel Km 9.5, Santa María Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico

Fax: + 52 951 505 0531, (if someone answers, ask "tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Señor Gobernador / Dear Governor

Secretary for the Interior, State of Oaxaca

Lic. Jorge Franco Vargas

Secretario General de Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca

Constitución 519, Esq. Mártires de Tacubaya, Oaxaca, Oaxaca

Fax: + 52 951 132 5378

Salutation: Señor Secretario/Dear Secretary

President of Mexico

Lic. Vicente Fox Quesada

Presidente de los Estados Unidos de México

Residencia Oficial de "Los Pinos", Col. San Miguel Chapultepec, México, D.F. México

Fax: + 52 5 55 2 77 23 76

Salutation: Estimado Presidente/Dear President

Director of Human Rights – Federal Interior Ministry

Maestro Ricardo Sepúlveda, Secretaría de Gobernación

Reforma 99, PISO 21, PH, Colonia Tabacalera, C.P. 06030, Mexico D.F. MEXICO

Fax: + 52 55 5128 0234 (if someone answers, ask "tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Estimado Maestro/Dear Sir

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 July 2006.