

PUBLIC

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18 May 2005

UA 126/05 Fear for safety

BOLIVIA **Silvestre Saisari Cruz (m), President of the *Movimiento Sin Tierra de Santa Cruz* (MST-SC)**

Silvestre Saisari Cruz, who heads an organization that represents landless peasants in Santa Cruz Department, was attacked on 9 May by a group of men allegedly linked to a local landowner, after a press conference at which he apparently criticised the actions of the landowner in a land dispute. Amnesty International believes that his life is in danger.

Silvestre Saisari is the President of the *Movimiento Sin Tierra de Santa Cruz* (MST-SC), the Landless Movement of Santa Cruz. The MST-SC represents some 400 landless families who have occupied land in Obispo Santiestevan Province, Santa Cruz Department, since August 2004, forming a community they have named Pueblos Unidos.

He called the 9 May press conference in the city of Santa Cruz to tell journalists about an alleged violent attack on the community on 7 May, by a large group of men linked to the landowner. The attackers allegedly burned the community's recently harvested crops of rice and pineapples. People living in the community allegedly caught 65 of the attackers and held them hostage. The police have surrounded Pueblos Unidos, and the community are facing eviction. All the hostages were released after a few days.

Silvestre Saisari was attacked as he left the press conference, in the main square of Santa Cruz, and was beaten and kicked. Police intervened to stop the attack, which was apparently filmed by journalists.

His attackers took Silvestre Saisari's bag, and his mobile phone, which has allegedly been used to make threatening phone calls to MST-SC members. Documents that were in the bag were allegedly shown during an interview with the landowner on the nationwide *Red 1 de Bolivia* TV station the following day.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has expressed its deep concern about the continued harassment and intimidation of those who are critical of the authorities, particularly human rights defenders, and including those providing assistance to members of indigenous groups involved in land disputes, and indigenous community leaders.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Silvestre Saisari, President of the *Movimiento Sin Tierra de Santa Cruz* (MST-SC), who was reportedly attacked and beaten on 9 May;
- urging the authorities to do everything in their power to guarantee his safety, in accordance with his wishes;
- calling for a prompt and impartial investigation into the attack on Silvestre Saisari and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling on the government to move speedily to arbitrate in land disputes, such as that involving the community of Pueblos Unidos in Obispo Santiestevan, to reduce the risk of violence.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior
Dr.Saúl Lara Torrico

Ministro de Gobierno
Av. Arce 2409
La Paz - Bolivia

Fax: + 591 2 244 1543
+ 591 2 244 2589

Salutation: Dear Minister/ Señor Ministro

Minister of the Presidency, Justice
and Human Rights

Sr. Ministro de la Presidencia e
Interino de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Sr. José Antonio Galindo
Palacio de Gobierno, Plaza Murillo, La Paz, Bolivia

Fax: + 591 2 215 3870
+ 591 2 215 3894

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Santa Cruz authority

Ing. Jaime Paz Rea
Prefecto del Departamento de Santa Cruz
Av. Omar Chávez Ortiz

Santa Cruz

Bolivia

Fax: +591 3 3129528

Salutation: Sr. Prefecto/Dear Prefect

Head of the National Police

Cdte. David Aramayo Aráoz
Comandante General de la Policía Nacional
La Paz, Bolivia

Fax: +591 2 2434149

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social
CEJIS – Santa Cruz
Alfredo Jordan N° 79
Santa Cruz
Bolivia

Fax: + 591 3 3535169

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 29 June 2005.