

UA 97/99

Fear of "I**GUATEMALA Carlos Coc Rax - Indigenous land activist leader**

Amnesty International is concerned about the "disappearance" of Carlos Coc Rax, an indigenous Q'eqchi community leader of Santa Rosa Balandra, in the municipality of El Estor, Izabal on 21 April 1999.

On the day he "disappeared" Carlos Coc Rax was returning from the capital, Guatemala City, where he had been negotiating land for ten communities. He arrived back in El Estor in the afternoon of the 21 April. The last person to see him alive was his brother, Javier Coc Rax, at around 7.30pm near the town pier. He told his brother that he was leaving in his launch for his home in the finca "Las Cañas". He did not arrive home and since then, he has not been seen in the community.

In the last few months Carlos Cox Rax had received death threats from a local landowner, with whom the Santa Rosa Balandra community was in dispute. His family fear for his life and safety. Since Carlos Coc Rax's "disappearance" was reported the authorities have, so far, made no effort to search for him in El Estor or in the department of Izabal.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

El Estor, in Izabal has a long history of land disputes between indigenous communities and local land owners (See UA:02/98 AMR 34/01/98 & 32/97 AMR 34/01/97). These clashes have often resulted in the violent displacement of communities as well as community leaders being threatened and intimidated by members of the security forces or private security guards on behalf of local land owners, business interests and local officials. .

Amnesty International is seriously concerned that Carlos Coc Rax's "disappearance" may be related to an ongoing pattern of intimidation against indigenous land activists in the municipality of El Estor, department of Izabal.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- requesting a full and immediate investigation into the "disappearance" of Carlos Coc Rax, missing since 21 April 1999.
- expressing serious concern that so far nothing has been done to clarify Carlos Coc Rax's "disappearance" despite having been reported to the authorities.
- calling for all threats and intimidation of indigenous land activist leaders in El Estor to be investigated thoroughly.
- remind the Guatemalan government of the principal reflected in Article 18 of the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 (1989) as an important factor in efforts to prevent abuses against indigenous peoples in land or resource disputes : "Adequate penalties shall be established by law for unauthorised intrusion upon, or use of, the lands of the people concerned, and governments shall take measures to prevent such offences".

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala
S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen, Presidente de la República de Guatemala
Palacio Nacional, 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 221 4537/230 1508

E-mail: alvaroarzu@guate.net

alvaroarzu@guateconnect.com

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Irigoyen

Minister of Agriculture Livestock & Nutrition

Sr. Mariano Ventura, Ministro de Agricultura, Ganadería y Nutrición

Palacio Nacional

6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

Tel: +502 332 3164

Fax: +502 332 8302

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/ Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric

Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado (ODHA)

6a Calle 7-70, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 232 8384

E-mail: odhagua@pronet.net.gt

Pueblo Maya Q'eqchi'

c/o Centro Claret

4 Avenida 6-33,

Zona 1, El Estor,

Izabal, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 949 7228

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 June 1999.