

PUBLIC

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21 January 2005

UA 19/05 Fear for safety/death threats

HONDURAS Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo (m) ] members of *Consejo Indígena de la Comunidad*  
Roberto Chicas Mejía (m) ] *de las Olominas* (Indigenous Communal  
Council of Las Olominas)  
Other members of the *Consejo Indígena de la Comunidad de las Olominas*  
Julio Elías Hernández (m), son of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez  
Other members of the family of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez

Killed: Hinginio Hernández Vásquez (m), Secretary of the *Consejo Indígena de la comunidad de las Olominas*

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Indigenous land rights activists Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo and Roberto Chicas Mejía are believed to be in grave danger. The men, members of the *Consejo Indígena de la Comunidad de las Olominas* (Indigenous Communal Council of Las Olominas), received a death threat after witnessing the killing of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez, the organization's Secretary. Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the two witnesses, the family of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez and other members of the *Consejo Indígena de la Comunidad de las Olominas*.

On 31 December 2004, Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo, Roberto Chicas Mejía and Hinginio Hernández Vásquez were visiting the town of Planes, some 25km from their village of las Olominas, in La Paz department, southern Honduras. They were reportedly ambushed by two armed men, who shot Hinginio Hernández. According to the two witnesses, Hinginio Hernández managed to run a short distance before falling to the ground. The two assailants reportedly caught up with him and slit his throat.

After killing Hinginio Hernández Vásquez, one of the armed men allegedly threatened Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo and Roberto Chicas Mejía, saying, "*Si ustedes dan declaraciones tambien a ustedes los voy a palmar*" ("If you tell anyone about this, I will kill you too"). Despite the threat, the two witnesses gave evidence to the local prosecutor on 7 January. They have reportedly identified one of the killers as a man from las Olominas, who has opposed the efforts of the *Consejo Indígena de la Comunidad de las Olominas* to gain communal rights to their land. The son of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez, Julio Elías Hernández, has also spoken about the killing on a local radio station. Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo, Roberto Chicas Mejía and Julio Elías Hernández have allegedly received no protection from the authorities, despite the threat to their lives. Hinginio Hernández Vásquez had reportedly also received death threats in relation to his work to secure communal land rights. He had reported these threats to the authorities on numerous occasions, however, no investigations were carried out or protection provided.

According to reports, this appears to be the latest incident in a campaign of intimidation to force the people of las Olominas to give up their legal rights to their land. Since 1996, when the legal papers giving the community ownership of the land were apparently stolen from the home of Hinginio Hernández Vásquez, the *Consejo Indígena de la Comunidad de las Olominas* has been trying to obtain a new community title to the land from the National Agrarian Institute, the state body responsible for issuing land titles. Since their efforts began they have been harassed and intimidated by some members of the community who have allegedly been trying to force them off the land, enabling it to be sold unlawfully.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo, Roberto Chicas Mejía, Julio Elías Hernández, other members of the family of Higinio Hernández Vásquez and of the *Consejo Indígena de la Comunidad de las Olominas*, following the killing of Higinio Hernández Vásquez;
- calling for immediate measures to be taken to guarantee the safety of the people named above, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling on the authorities to initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Higinio Hernández Vásquez and threats against Genaro Vásquez Lorenzo and Roberto Chicas Mejía, to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to ensure the National Agrarian Institute takes immediate action on the request by the *Consejo Indígena de la Comunidad de las Olominas* to obtain a new communal title to their land, after their legal title papers were apparently stolen from them in 1996.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of Security

Dr. Oscar Alvarez

Ministro de Seguridad

Ministerio de Seguridad Pública

Edificio Poujol, 4o piso, Col. Palmira (Blvd. Morazán)

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax: + 504 220 4479/ 4352 (please keep trying)**

**Salutation: Dear Minister/Estimado Señor Ministro**

Attorney General of the Republic

Sr. Ramón Ovidio Navarro Duarte

Fiscal General de la República

Colonia Loma del Guijaro

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax: + 504 221 5666 / 5667 (please keep trying)**

**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Estimado Fiscal General**

**COPIES TO:**

Special Prosecutor for Ethnic Affairs

Licda Jany del Cid

Fiscal Especial de las Etnias

Edificio Castillo Poujol, 4a Avda,

Colonia Palmira, Boulevard Morazán

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax: + 504 221 3099 (if someone answers, say, "me da tono de fax para Jany del Cid, por favor)**

Local Public Prosecutor's Office, Marcala

Lic. Miguel Angel Izaguirre Flores

Ministerio Publico

Marcala, Departamento La Paz, Honduras

**Fax: + 504 764 5889**

Human Rights Organisation

Civic Council of Grassroots and Indigenous Organisations (COPINH)

**Fax: + 504 783 0817**

and to diplomatic representatives of Honduras accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 March 2005.