

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 41/001/2005

UA 07/05

Fear for safety/death threats

12 January 2005

MEXICO

**Obtilia Eugenio Manuel (f), member of indigenous organization *Organización del Pueblo Indígena Tlapaneco, AC* (OPIT)
Her family
Other members of OPIT**

Indigenous rights activist Obtilia Eugenio Manuel has received anonymous death threats, and her house has been watched. Amnesty International believes she and her family are in danger.

As a leading member of the indigenous organization *Organización del Pueblo Indígena Tlapaneco, AC* (OPIT), she has documented human rights violations against indigenous communities in the southern state of Guerrero, particularly those committed by the military. Among these were the cases of two women from the *Tlapaneca* indigenous group, Valentina Rosendo Cantú and Inés Fernández Ortega, who were reportedly raped by soldiers in 2002. She spoke out about the authorities' failure to properly investigate the rapes in a speech at a 3-4 December conference in Guerrero on indigenous rights.

According to a local NGO, on 9 December a letter was delivered to her house, in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres. It warned her that *muy pronto descansar[ás] en paz* (soon you will rest in peace), and also threatened her family. It told her that "You keep on trying to attack us with your stupid lies about the rape of Valentina and Ines. We've had enough of the stupidities you accuse us of. We were already going to get you but now you are really in trouble" (*..tu sigue dando duro golpe a nosotros sigue con tu mentira de violación a Valentina e Inés ya basta [de] estupideces, de lo que nos echas, ya te vamos a dar gusto de por si tenia hambre [e]l gusano de ti...*)

Men were later seen watching her house at least three times. On 26 December, her sister Andrea saw two men taking notes close to Obtilia's house. On 4 and 5 January two men were seen taking photographs and watching the OPIT offices. She had suffered intimidation and death threats before, over the alleged rape of the two indigenous women, but had not reported them, for fear of reprisals against her and her family, including her two young daughters.

The Mexican army carried out an investigation of the rapes in 2002 and dismissed the allegations. Amnesty International has repeatedly criticised investigations of human rights violations committed by military personnel as lacking impartiality and violating other fundamental rights of victims. In November 2004 the organization published a report, *Mexico: Indigenous women and military injustice* (AMR 41/033/2004) highlighting the lack of justice in the rape cases and intimidation suffered by many communities in the region.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Those who struggle to defend human rights in Mexico have often been the first to come under attack, and to have their own rights violated and their safety threatened. Human rights defenders and community activists in Guerrero state have frequently been the target of threats, harassment and smear campaigns. Those responsible are rarely brought to justice. In many parts of Guerrero the army carries out operations against drug producers and traffickers. There are reports of military patrols intimidating indigenous communities as they search for traffickers and alleged members of armed opposition groups. The authorities rarely investigate such incidents, leaving communities extremely vulnerable and unwilling to lodge complaints.

The impunity for the rape of Ines Fernandez and Valentina Cantu has a direct impact on women and indigenous communities in Guerrero, and the heavy military presence keeps them in fear.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defender Otilia Eugenio Manuel, her family and other members of OPIT following the death threats and the intimidation she suffered in December 2004 and January 2005 in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres, Guerrero state;
- urging the authorities to give protection to those at risk, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling for an impartial, prompt and full investigation into the death threats and other acts of intimidation, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for an impartial investigation, in the civilian justice system, into the alleged rape by soldiers of Valentina Rosendo Cantú and Inés Fernández Ortega.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Guerrero

Lic. René Juárez Cisneros,
Gobernador del Estado de Guerrero
Palacio de Gobierno, segundo piso, Plaza Central, Primer Congreso de Anahuac
Colonia Centro, Chilpancingo 39000, Guerrero, Mexico

Fax: + 52 747 47 23125

Salutation: Dear Governor/Señor Gobernador

Attorney General of Guerrero

Lic. Jesus Ramirez Guerrero, Procurador General de Justicia del Estado de Guerrero
Carretera Nacional México-Acapulco Km. 6+300
Tramo Chilpancingo- Petaquillos, Chilpancingo 39090, Guerrero, Mexico

Fax: + 52 747 47 22328

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Señor Procurador

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Santiago Creel
Secretario de Gobernación, Secretaría de Gobernación
Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez, Delegación Cuauhtémoc, México D.F., C.P.06600, México

Fax: +525 55 093 3414

Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear Minister

Minister of National Defence

Gral. Gerardo Clemente Ricardo Vega García
Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional
Bulevar M. Ávila Camacho esqu. Industria Militar S/N, Col. Lomas de Sotelo
Delegación Miguel Hidalgo, México D.F., C.P. 11640, MEXICO

Fax: +52 55 55578963

Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Human rights organisation

Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña "Tlachinollan" AC.,
Calle Mina número 77, Colonia Centro, Tlapa de Comonfort Código Postal 41304, Guerrero, Mexico

and 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 23 February 2005.