

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 255/94 Rape / Torture / Fear for safety

1 July 1994

MEXICO María Teresa MENDEZ SANTIZ (f), aged 20
 Cristina MENDEZ SANTIZ (f), aged 18
 María MENDEZ SANTIZ (f), aged 16

- all Tzeltal indigenous women from Altamirano, Chiapas

On 4 June 1994 María Teresa, Cristina and María Méndez Santiz were reportedly tortured and then raped by members of the Mexican army. Amnesty International fears for the safety of the three women as they were reportedly threatened with death if they told anyone about the rape and torture.

The three women and their mother were returning to their community of Santa Rosita Sibaquil after selling their produce in Altamirano, state of Chiapas, when the three daughters were detained by soldiers at a roadblock and taken to a nearby building. There they were allegedly tortured and threatened with death to force them to confess to participating in the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN*, Zapatista National Liberation Army (see background below). They were then reportedly raped by some 30 soldiers and threatened with death if they told anyone about their rape and torture.

Reports of the rape and torture first appeared in the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* on 17 June. A local human rights organization in Chiapas was later able to obtain testimonies from the three women and other residents of Santa Rosita Sibaquil supporting the allegations of rape. On 29 June the women were examined by an independent medical professional, who has reportedly found sequelae consistent with the allegations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 1 January 1994, hundreds of armed peasants, calling themselves the EZLN, took control of several towns in the state of Chiapas. There was heavy fighting for several days. On 12 January the government declared a ceasefire, although there were reports of continuing land attacks by the armed forces during the following days. An Amnesty International delegation visiting the area in late January confirmed earlier reports of a number of human rights abuses, including the extrajudicial execution of at least five rebels and the torture of rebel and civilian detainees at the hands of the security forces.

Monitoring human rights violations in Chiapas has been made difficult by the remoteness of many of these communities, the fact that most of the indigenous populations in the area speak little or no Spanish and the continuous threats against the local population by members of the army and the landowners.

Chiapas has long been the scene of continuing human rights violations by the security forces in the context of land disputes and allegations of electoral fraud. These violations have included massive and arbitrary arrests, torture, ill-treatment and political killings. A large number of the victims of such abuses belong to the poorest sectors of the population, and include women and children. Very rarely have those responsible been brought to justice.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes and airmail letters

either in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing grave concern at the reported rape of María Teresa, Cristina and María Méndez Santiz, all Tzeltal indigenous women from Altamirano municipality, state of Chiapas by members of the Mexican army;
- urging an immediate and thorough investigation into their rape and torture and the death threats they received and that those found responsible be brought to justice;
- requesting that all necessary measures be taken to ensure the physical safety of these three women, their relatives and the whole community of Santa Rosita Sibaquil, municipality of Altamirano;
- ensuring that the security forces abide by the UN Body of principles for the protection of persons under any form of detention and imprisonment and the UN Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

APPEALS TO1) President of the Republic

Lic. Carlos Salinas de Gortari
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio Nacional
 06067 México D.F., Mexico

Telegrams: Presidente Salinas, México D.F., Mexico

Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme

Faxes: +52 5 271 1764

Salutation: Sr. Presidente/Dear President

2) Interior Minister

Dr Jorge Carpizo McGregor
 Secretario de Gobernación
 Secretaría de Gobernación
 Bucarelli 99, 1er piso
 Colonia Juárez
 06669 México DF, MEXICO

Telegrams: Secretario Gobernación, México D.F., Mexico

Telexes: 1774376, 1774375

Faxes: +52 5 592 0014

Salutation: Sr. Secretario de Gobernación/Dear Minister

3) Attorney General's Office

Lic Humberto Benítez Treviño
 Procurador General de la República
 Procuraduría General de la República
 Paseo de la Reforma y Violeta
 Colonia Guerrero
 06300 Mexico DF, MEXICO

Telegrams: Procurador General, Mexico D.F., Mexico

Telexes: 1777572

Faxes: +52 5 526 8506

Salutation: Sr Procurador General/Dear Attorney General

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:1) National Human Rights Commission

Sres.
 Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos

Periférico Sur 3469
Col San Jerónimo Lídice
10200 México DF, Mexico

2) Human rights organization
CONPAZ - Coordinación de organismos
no gubernamentales por la paz en Chiapas
Chapa de Corzo 19
El Cerrillo, San Cristóbal de las Casas
29220 Chiapas, Mexico

3) Daily newspaper
Sr. Editor
Reforma
Reforma 295, 9° piso
06170 México DF, 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 11 August 1994.