

UA 115/98 Possible Prisoners of Conscience/Fear for safety 15 April 1998

MEXICO Tomás Sánchez Gómez)

Nicolás Mazariego Pérez)	
Antonio López Vázquez)	
Nicolas López Vázquez)	All members of the indigenous
Sebastián González)	Tzeltales group and community
Mateo González López)	activists
Justino Sánchez López)	
Luis Menéndez Medina)	
Sergio Valdez Ruvalcaba)	University teacher
Miguel Hernández Pérez)	Members of the NGO "Fray Pedro
Fidelino Cruz Mendoza)	Lorenzo de la Nada", based in
Manuel Hernández Pérez)	Ocosingo, Chiapas State
Andrés Gutiérrez Hernández)	

There are serious fears for the safety of the above 13 people, who have been arrested by members of the Mexican security forces during the last few days. They are believed to have been detained only because of their peaceful political activities.

On 11 April 1998, Tomás Sánchez Gómez, Nicolás Mazariego Pérez, Antonio López Vázquez, Nicolás López Vázquez, Sebastián González, Mateo González López, Justino Sánchez López, Luis Menéndez Medina and Sergio Valdez Ruvalcaba were arrested by members of the security forces in the community of Taniperla, Ocosingo municipality, Chiapas State.

Eye witnesses state that no arrest warrants were shown and that the detainees were ill-treated and threatened with death. The security forces reportedly also carried photos of some of the detainees, and a "black-list" containing details of indigenous activists in Chiapas.

The detainees were taken to San Cristóbal de las Casas, Ocosingo's closest town, where they were held incommunicado until 12 April. They were then transferred to the *Procuraduría de Justicia del Estado* (PJE), State Attorney's Office, in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the Chiapas capital, where it is believed they are still being held. None of their relatives, solicitors or local NGOs were informed of the transferral.

On 13 April, Miguel Hernández Pérez, Fidelino Cruz Mendoza, Manuel Hernández Pérez and Andrés Gutiérrez Hernández, human rights observers who were on their way to Taniperla to talk to the eyewitnesses of the 11 April arrests, were detained by security forces. They were also taken to the PJE, where they are currently being held. It is unclear whether they are being held incommunicado.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 22 December 1997 45 displaced indigenous peasants were reportedly massacred in Acteal, Chiapas, by paramilitary groups associated with the state authorities (see UA 409/97, AMR 41/117/97, 23 December 1997). Since then, members of the armed forces have conducted arbitrary searches in Chiapas, entering areas controlled by the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, (EZLN), Zapatista National Liberation Army, in violation of agreements between the government and the EZLN. This has intensified the militarization of the region on both sides.

Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of gross human rights violations against human rights defenders, community activists and journalist in the context of their human rights work in Chiapas. On 11 April 1998, 12 international human rights observers and activists working in Chiapas were expelled from Mexico. Two international journalists were ill-treated by members of the police while photographing the expulsion

(for a similar case see UA Extra 17/98, AMR 41/11/98, 20 February 1998 and follow-up AMR 41/12/98, 23 February 1998).

Those who continue to work on behalf of indigenous communities in Chiapas remain at serious risk of human rights violations, including extrajudicial execution, torture and "disappearance".

In June 1993, Mexico adopted the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action. This recognises the important part played by national governments, international governmental organisations, and domestic and international NGOs in the protection of human rights. By impeding the legitimate work of human rights monitors in Mexico, the government is failing its international commitment to implement the Vienna Declaration.

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

- urging that sustained evidence is presented against the 13 people (mention some of them) detained on 11 and 13 April 1998 in Taniperla, Ocosingo Municipality, Chiapas State, or that they be immediately and unconditionally released;
- urging that immediate measures be taken to guarantee the safety of all witnesses to the arrests;
- urging for an investigation to be made into the allegation of ill-treatment and death threats to the people arrested, that the findings be made public, and that those found responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing deep alarm at the level of harassment against human rights defenders in Mexico, whether they are Mexican or foreign nationals;
- calling for guarantees that all national and international human rights observers and journalists in Mexico be allowed to carry out their lawful activities free from interference.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of the State of Chiapas

Lic. Roberto Albores Guillén

Gobernador del Estado de Chiapas

Palacio de Gobierno, Piso 1, Col. Centro, 29000

Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Estado de Chiapas, MEXICO

Telegrams: Gobernador del Estado, Chiapas, México

Faxes: + 52 961 20918

Salutations: Sr. Procurador / Dear Governor

Attorney General of Chiapas

Lic. Jorge Hernández Aguilar

Procurador General de Chiapas

Procuraduría General de Chiapas

Tuxtla Gutierrez, Estado de Chiapas, MEXICO

Telegrams: Procurador del Estado, Chiapas, México

Faxes: + 52 961 65376 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Sr. Procurador / Dear State Attorney General

COPIES TO:

Comite de Derechos Humanos "Fray Lorenzo de la Nada"

Parroquia San Jacinto, Ocosingo, Chiapas, 29950, Mexico

Fax: + 52 967 30217 / + 52 967 30883

"Fray Bartolomé de las Casas" Human Rights Organization

Francisco León 5, Barrio de Santa Lucía

San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 29250, México

Fax: + 52 967 83551

E-mail: cdhbcasas@laneta.apc.org

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 28 May 1998.