

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 41/30/00

23 June 2000

UA 177/00

Fear for safety / Death Threats / Ill-treatment

MEXICO

Eliud Almaguer Aldape (workers' leader), Omar Gil Aguilera and other workers at Duro Manufacturing, Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas state.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of workers involved in a strike at the Duro Manufacturing plant, in Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas state, after police units reportedly attacked, beat and detained strikers on 19 June 2000 in an apparent attempt to break up the strike.

According to reports, two separate police operations were carried out on the morning of 19 June in which strikers were threatened with guns by the police and told to leave the area. When they refused the police attacked them, hitting one woman in the abdomen with the butt of a gun, and slapping another across the face. Those who attempted to flee the violence were pursued and beaten with sticks. One of the injured was reportedly eight months pregnant and had to be hospitalized. Another woman was told by a police officer, "If you don't shut your mouth, I'll kill you" ("*si no te callas la boca te mato*"). The police also tore up strike banners. The only person on the scene taking photos was beaten, arrested and had his camera smashed by police.

The police reportedly detained more than a dozen strikers, including Eliud Almaguer Aldape and Omar Gil Aguilera. All have now been released on bail, but are facing charges of participating in criminal gangs and illegally holding others against their will (*pandillerismo y privación ilegal de libertad*), reportedly on the grounds that the manager and security guards were still inside the plant when strikers hung their banners on the gates of the site.

The Duro workers have been conducting a work stoppage since 11 June in protest at the transnational company's reported failure both to recognize their independent trade union and to fulfill promises made to improve pay and working conditions. Workers, the majority of whom are women, have reported incidents of sexual harassment, more than a dozen cases of losing fingers from unguarded machinery, pregnant women working with hazardous chemicals, and unsanitary conditions.

According to reports, at least nine Duro workers have been fired for their attempts to set up a trade union - a right enshrined in the Mexican Constitution.

Reports suggest that the ill-treatment of the strikers, the detentions and subsequent charges were carried out as part of a state action to repress legitimate trade union activity. Amnesty International is concerned that the workers may suffer further similar attacks and detentions during their ongoing strike.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Mexican side of the border with the United States of America is home to many *maquiladoras*, plants of transnational companies seeking to take advantage of favourable manufacturing and trading conditions in the area. Over the years there have been a number of reports of intimidation and threats against workers involved in industrial disputes, in particular those attempting to establish independent trade unions. On a number of occasions the security forces have reportedly been employed to break up strikes and detain workers' leaders to deter such legitimate demands.

Strikes by an independent union in the Han Young *maquiladora* in Tijuana, northern Mexico, have reportedly been suppressed by police on several occasions over the last two years. Recently there have been reports of the government-affiliated union hiring thugs to break up the strike. On 10 March in another *maquiladora*, Lear-Favesa in Ciudad Juárez, northern Mexico, about

100 striking workers and their families were reportedly beaten by Municipal Public Security police (*agentes de la Seguridad Pública Municipal*).

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

- expressing concern at the reports of ill-treatment by the police against striking workers at Duro Manufacturing in Río Bravo, Tamaulipas state on 19 June 2000;
- expressing further concern that security force actions were carried out with the apparent intention of preventing legitimate union activity;
- expressing concern at the apparently unsubstantiated criminal charges brought against those detained;
- calling for investigations into the police repression of a strike at Duro Manufacturing and the ill-treatment of workers by the police;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee the safety of all the strikers at Duro, ensuring that they do not suffer further police brutality nor arbitrary arrest;
- reminding the authorities that everyone has the right to organize trade unions for the protection of their interests, as stated in article 123 of the Mexican Constitution and article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

APPEALS TO:

If you have difficulties obtaining a fax tone, please keep trying. Sometimes fax machines are switched off temporarily. If a voice answers, please say "el tono de fax, por favor".

Minister of the Interior
 Lic. Diódoro Carrasco Altamirano
 Secretario de Gobernación
 Secretaría de Gobernación
 Bucareli 99, 1er. piso
 Col. Juárez
 México D.F. 06699 MEXICO

Telegrams: Secretario Gobernación, México
Faxes: +52 5 546 5350
Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear Minister

Governor of Tamaulipas state
 Lic. Tomás Yárrington Ruvalcaba
 Gobernador del Estado de Tamaulipas
 Palacio de Gobierno
 Av. Juárez y 5 de Mayo
 Ciudad Victoria 87009
 Tamaulipas MEXICO

Telegrams: Gobernador, Tamaulipas, México
Faxes: +52 131 887 01 / 23492
Salutation: Señor Gobernador / Dear Governor

Attorney of Tamaulipas state
 Lic. Eduardo Garza Rivas
 Procurador General de Justicia del Estado de Tamaulipas
 Palacio de Justicia, Boulevard Fraccedi Balboa s/n,
 Col. Centro, Ciudad Victoria 87000
 Tamaulipas MEXICO

Telegrams: Procurador, Tamaulipas, México
Faxes: +52 131 28427
Salutation: Señor Procurador / Dear Attorney General

Governmental National Human Rights Commission
 Dr. José Luis Soberanes Fernández,
 Presidente de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos,
 Periférico Sur 3469, 5o piso,

Col. San Jerónimo Lídice,
México D.F., C.P. 10200
MEXICO

Faxes: +52 5 135 0595

E-mail: correo@cndh.org.mx

Salutation: Estimado Dr. Soberanes / Dear Dr. Soberanes

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental Organization

Centro de Investigación Laboral y Asesoría Sindical (CILAS)

Tabasco 262-402, Col. Roma

México D.F. CP 06700

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 4 August 2000.