

PUBLIC

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UA 322/03

Fear for safety

10 November 2003

MEXICO

Evangelina Arce, (f) ]  
Marisela Ortiz Rivera (f) ] human rights defenders  
Luz Estela Castro (f), lawyer ]  
And their families

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Evangelina Arce and Marisela Ortíz Rivera have been at the forefront of the campaign for truth and justice for the women who have been abducted and murdered in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua State. They have frequently criticised the failure of the authorities to effectively investigate these crimes. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety and that of their families, following recent threats against them. There are also concerns at efforts by the authorities to undermine the work of lawyer Luz Estela Castro.

Evangelina Arce is the mother of Silvia Arce who has been missing since 1998 in Chihuahua. At 3pm on 11 October, a man who said he was from the "Special Prosecutor's Office for the Investigation of the Murders of Women" but who carried no identification papers, went to Evangelina Arce's home. He repeatedly asked her daughter for a photograph of Silvia. He reportedly claimed to be a translator for a foreign expert in forensic facial reconstructions, who had been contracted by the State Public Prosecutor's Office to identify the remains of eight women who were abducted and murdered. The State Public Prosecutor's Office reportedly believes that of one of eight bodies could be that of Silvia Arce. He also tried to pressurize Silvia's sister to go to the Public Prosecutor's Office to identify the body there and then. However, she refused to give him a photograph or accompany him. He then reportedly told her that on the following Monday, the foreign forensic expert or a representative would be waiting for the photograph at the Hotel Lucerna. Following this visit however, the Special Prosecutor's Office has denied having sent any representative to Evangelina Arce's home.

The family has also denounced the fact that several days before, the occupants of an unmarked car had been seen watching their home. Evangelina Arce identified one of them as a state judicial police officer. Despite the incident being reported to the authorities, no steps have been taken to identify the officers watching the family home. The authorities have refused a request by Evangelina Arce for there to be a line up parade of state judicial police agents, which would enable her to identify the occupant of the unmarked car. These incidents have occurred at a time of increased national and international pressure on the authorities to renew the stalled investigation into the abduction of Silvia Arce. Evangelina Arce was reportedly assaulted by three unidentified men on 30 April 2003 (see UA 123/03, AMR 41/19/2003, 6 May 2003) and prior to this she had received several anonymous telephone calls.

Marisela Ortíz Rivera who together with Evangelina Arce, works with *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*, Our Daughters Return Home, has been threatened on several occasions. On 24 October 2003, her car was followed by two vehicles, the occupants of whom reportedly told her they would kill her and her family if she carried on speaking out. Marisela Ortíz has been threatened on previous occasions (see UA 36/03, AMR 41/005/2003, 11 April 2003, and follow-up). After the recent threat, she provided an identity portrait of the man responsible and received protection from the Federal Attorney General's Office. However, a representative of the state Public Prosecutor's Office visited her home and showed her son he was in possession of the portrait demonstrating close links between Federal and State Prosecutors raising serious concern about the effectiveness of the protection measures provided and the investigation into the threats.

In the neighbouring city of Chihuahua, the State Public Prosecutor's Office made Luz Estela Castro, a human rights activist and lawyer working on a number of cases of abductions and murders of women in the city, the subject of a criminal investigation on an unrelated case. There is concern that this investigation is unwarranted and may be in reprisal for her work on cases of abducted and murdered women.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Over 370 women have been murdered in Ciudad Juarez in Northern Mexico since 1993. At least 137 victims were subject to sexual violence prior to death. The pattern of violence against women has spread to the neighbouring city of Chihuahua in recent years. In August 2003 Amnesty International published a report *Intolerable Killings: 10 Years Of Abductions And Murders Of Women In Ciudad Juárez And Chihuahua*, AMR 41/026/2003.

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

- expressing concern at recent threats, intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders working on the cases of abducted and murdered women in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua, particularly, Evangelina Arce, Marisela Ortiz and their families as well as Luz Estela Castro;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee their safety, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into all incidents of harassment and intimidation in order to identify those responsible and bring them to justice;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals.

## **APPEALS TO:**

### Minister of the Interior

Lic. Santiago Creel  
Secretario de Gobernación  
Secretaría de Gobernación  
Bucareli 99, 1er. Piso, Co. Juarez  
Delegación Cuauhtémoc  
México D.F., C.P. 06600  
MEXICO

**Fax:** +525 55 093 3414/ 093 3415  
**Salutation:** Señor Secretario/ Dear Minister  
**E-mail:** santiagoocreel@compuserve.com

### Governor of the State of Chihuahua

Lic. Patricio Martínez  
Gobernador del Estado de Chihuahua  
Aldama 901  
Colonia Centro,  
Chihuahua, México

**Fax:** +52 614 429 3464  
**Salutation:** Señor Gobernador/ Dear Governor

### President of the Republic

Lic. Vicente Fox Quesada  
Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos  
Residencia Oficial de "Lod Pinos"  
Co. San Miguel Chapultepec  
México D.F., C.P. 11850  
México

**Fax:** +52 5 2 77 23 76  
**E-mail:** webadmon@op.presidencia.gob.mx  
**Salutation:** Señor Presidente/ Dear Mr. President

## **COPIES TO:**

Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights  
Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos A.C. (CMDPDH)  
Tahuantepec 155, Col. Roma Sur, Mexico DF, CP 5584 2731, México  
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Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa (Bring Our Daughters Home)  
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Ciudad Juarez, México  
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Justicia para Nuestras Hijas  
Río Soto La Marina 8204  
Colonia Alfredo Chávez  
Chihuahua, Chihuahua, México

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 22 December 2003.