

# URGENT ACTION

## GOVERNMENT REFUSES TO PROTECT COMMUNITIES

**Fourteen Q'echi indigenous communities in Guatemala, who were forcibly evicted in March 2011, have been told that the Guatemalan government won't support or protect them. Up to 800 families in the Valle de Polochic in north-eastern Guatemala are at risk of being attacked and do not have access to adequate food, water and housing.**

On 15 March, the police and the army forcibly evicted a farm called Miralvalle. One man was killed and two people allegedly suffered from health problems because of teargas. The same day, a farm called Agua Caliente was evicted. On 16 March, the police and the army evicted a farm called Quinich, with reports that the houses were set on fire. On 17 March, six further farms were evicted: Río Frío, Bellaflor, Ocho de Agosto, Los Recuerdos, Paraná, Santa Rosita. On 18 March, three more farms were evicted: El Sauce, Las Tinajas and Semau.

According to information received by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), a total of 700-800 families were evicted from the 14 communities. These people still do not have access to food, water, housing, healthcare or education and they continue to be in grave danger of further attacks, threats and intimidation.

On 20 June, the IACHR noted the precarious conditions of the communities and requested the State to guarantee the life and physical integrity of the community members, provide humanitarian assistance including food and shelter and come to an agreement with the beneficiaries on the measures to be adopted. Representatives of the Presidential Commission for Human Rights (COPREDEH) visited the communities on 2 August. They claimed that the State was no longer obliged to implement the measures requested by the IACHR, as they alleged that community members had reoccupied some of the lands from which they were evicted. The State has also refused to address the issue at the core of this conflict; a dispute over land ownership, which has been exacerbated by a State failure to provide adequate alternative housing to the communities.

On 14 September, the community representatives submitted a report to the IACHR detailing a series of attacks, threats and killings that they have suffered between March and September 2011.

### **Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:**

- Urging the authorities to provide protection for all members of the 14 Q'echi indigenous communities who were forcibly evicted in March 2011, in strict accordance with their wishes. This must include adequate alternative accommodation where the communities have access to shelter, food, water, healthcare services and where their physical integrity can be guaranteed.
- Reminding COPREDEH that the Guatemalan State is required to comply with Precautionary Measures PM-121-11 issued by the IACHR to protect the members of the 14 Q'echi indigenous communities of the Municipality of Panzós. This includes their right to life, but also their right to adequate food, water and housing.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 NOVEMBER 2011 TO:**

#### President

Ing. Álvaro Colom Caballeros  
 Presidente de la República  
 Casa Presidencial, 6ª Avenida 4-41, Zona 1,  
 Puerta del Centro  
 Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA  
 Fax: +502 2221 4445

**Salutation: Dear President/Estimado Sr. Presidente**

#### President of the Presidential Commission on Human Rights

Ruth del Valle Cobar  
 Presidenta de COPREDEH  
 2 Av. 10-50 Zona 9, Ciudad de Guatemala,  
 Guatemala, C.A. 01009  
 Fax: +502 2334 0119

**Salutation: Dear Presidenta /Estimada Sra. Presidenta**

#### **Copies to:**

Comisión de Peticionarios de Medidas Cautelares CIDH 121-11  
 Unión Latinoamericana de Mujeres por el Derecho a Defender nuestros Derechos – ULAM  
 3ª Calle 4-43, Zona 2,  
 Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala  
 Email: [ulamguatemala@gmail.com](mailto:ulamguatemala@gmail.com)

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Rural workers from the indigenous Q'eqchi' communities, in the Guatemalan department of Alta Verapaz, say that they have been living and working in 14 settlements for about 30 years, although a local company disputes the ownership of the land. A local judge issued an eviction order on 7 February 2011 against 14 communities. On 14 March, one day before the eviction was due to take place, the community and the authorities met to try to settle the dispute, but the community was not told that the eviction was due to take place the following day.

Various acts of violence have been perpetrated against community members from March to September 2011; Antonio Beb Ac was killed during the evictions in March, (UA 83/11) Oscar Reyes was killed in May while he was tending to crops on the disputed land from which he was evicted (UA 157/11: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR34/005/2011/en>), and in August, 3 members of the Paraná community were injured by shotguns allegedly fired at them by private security guards that work for the local firm that claims to own the land from which the communities were evicted, (UA 249/11: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR34/010/2011/en>). On 14 September, the community members denounced further acts of intimidation, threats and harassments perpetrated against them to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that allegedly occurred in late August and early September.

Guatemala is a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and is therefore obliged to ensure that "evictions should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights". Under the same covenant, Guatemala is obliged to guarantee respect for "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food".

Name: Fourteen Q'eqchi indigenous communities in the Valle de Polochic, north-eastern Guatemala  
Gender m/f: Both

This is the first update of UA: 83/11 (AMR 34/004/2011). Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR34/004/2011/en>  
Further information on UA: 83/11 Index: AMR 34/014//2011 Issue Date: 18 October 2011

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