

URGENT ACTION

COMMUNITY UNDER SIEGE IN MEXICO

The community of San Juan Copala in southern Mexico is surrounded by paramilitaries. Those trying to break the siege have been threatened, attacked or killed. Despite media attention on the area since a local human rights defender and an international observer were killed, the federal and state authorities have not taken action to end the siege

The 700 Indigenous Triqui inhabitants of San Juan Copala, Oaxaca state, declared it an autonomous Indigenous municipality in 2007 in an effort to unite the Triqui peoples. As it governs itself, it does not recognize the authority of existing public officials in the main non- Triqui towns of the region. For several months, members of an armed group called Ubisort have blockaded the community, in apparent reprisal for the declaration of autonomy. According to residents, Ubisort broke the water pipe into the community, forcing residents to use a contaminated water source, and have prevented damaged electricity cables from being repaired. Only a few residents are allowed to fetch food on foot from the nearest town. All vehicles have been turned back since early April. Shots have been fired into the community from the surrounding hills and on 17 April, José Celestino Hernández Cruz, a man from San Juan Copala, was killed by Ubisort. Since then the siege of the community has intensified. Teachers and medical staff cannot enter the community, restricting access to education and health services. Ubisort is linked to the governing political party in Oaxaca, the Revolutionary Institutional Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI).

On 27 April a group of human rights defenders, activists and journalists accompanied by international observers tried to reach San Juan Copala to raise awareness of the siege and bring aid. Armed members of Ubisort ambushed them, killing one woman, local human rights defender Alberta Cariño, known as Beatriz or Bety, and a Finnish man, Jyri Antero Jaakkola (see UA 101/10, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR41/035/2010/en>, and update).

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- calling on the federal and state government to take immediate action to protect the residents of San Juan Copala, and ensure that they have access to adequate supplies of food and water; as well as all necessary health care;
- urging them to end the siege of the community by the Ubisort armed group, so that residents can move freely, communicate with the outside world and receive visits from humanitarian missions without fear of attack or reprisal;
- calling for an investigation into the death of José Celestino Hernández Cruz, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- calling on the federal authorities to prevent human rights abuses committed by members of Ubisort against local residents, and to investigate the group's links to members of the PRI, the governing party in Oaxaca, with all those implicated in human rights abuses brought to justice;

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 JUNE 2010 TO:

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Fernando Francisco Gómez-Mont
Secretaría de Gobernación
Bucareli 99, 1er. piso,
Col. Juárez, Del. Cuauhtémoc,
México D.F., C.P.06600, MEXICO
Fax: +52 55 5093 3414
E-mail: secretario@segob.gob.mx
Salutation: Señor Secretario/Dear
Minister

Governor of Oaxaca

Lic. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz
Gobernador del Estado de Oaxaca
Carretera Oaxaca-Puerto Ángel, Km.
9.5, Santa María Coyotepec,
Oaxaca C.P. 71254, Oaxaca, MEXICO
Fax: +52 951 502 0530
(ask for the fax: "el tono de fax, por
favor")
E-mail: gobernador@oaxaca.gob.mx
Salutation: Dear Governor/
Señor Gobernador

Copies to:

NGO

Centro de Apoyo Comunitario
Trabajando Unidos - CACTUS
Jazmín 31, Fraccionamiento Jardines
del Sur
Huajuapán de León, Oax. C.P. 69007
Mexico

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Despite repeated calls for the local and state government to take action, nothing has been done to hold members of Ubisort to account for the killings or the siege of San Juan Copala, to ensure the community has access to adequate supplies of food and water, and to guarantee that they can live without fear. On 5 May the National Human Rights Commission called for protection for the residents of San Juan Copala.

Those leading efforts to break the cycle of exclusion, inequality, poverty and other human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples in Mexico are paying a high price.

The mainly Indigenous Triqui region is one of the poorest and most troubled in the country. For more than 30 years it has been riven by inter-community conflict in which scores of people have been killed. The state and federal authorities have rarely taken action to hold those responsible to account and the ruling party in the state has often been accused of exacerbating conflict in the region via the creation of organization such as Ubisort that receive government grants for social development. The rights of this Indigenous group of consistently been ignored and violated. The declaration of autonomy by San Juan Copala was an attempt by the Indigenous community to determine how it is governed, and distance itself from the local political parties who have been blamed for this violence and establish traditional Triqui governance to overcome community divisions.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that “Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to .. any other act of violence.”

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