

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 28/01/00

UA 10/00

Fear for safety/possible prisoners of conscience

18 January 2000

ECUADOR

Ciro Guzmán Aldas - Political party leader

Luis Villacis Maldonado - Trade union and community leader

José Chávez - Trade union leader

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The three men named above were detained by the security forces on 15 January 2000, apparently only because they called for President Jamil Mahuad to resign over Ecuador's economic crisis. Amnesty International therefore believes they may be prisoners of conscience and is seriously concerned for their safety, in particular that they may be ill-treated and tortured.

Ciro Guzmán Aldas is president of the *Movimiento Popular Democrático*, Popular Democratic Movement, a left of centre political party. Luis Villacis Maldonado is president of the *Frente Patriótico*, Patriotic Front, a coalition of trade unions and grassroots organizations, and José Chávez is president of the Ecuadorean Confederation of Free Trade Unions, *Confederación Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones Sindicales Libres*.

Amnesty International has been told that the security forces are planning to detain a number of other grassroots and opposition leaders in the near future.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 5 January 2000 President Mahuad reimposed a national state of emergency - in force intermittently since the beginning of 1999 - as trade unions, indigenous groups and grassroots organizations called for mass demonstrations and protests against his government's policy of "dollarisation". On 11 January Ecuador's Central Bank approved the President's proposal to legalise the dollar as the official currency of Ecuador and gradually take the sucre out of circulation, in an effort to curb the runaway inflation that has led to the devaluation of the currency.

During the state of emergency the National Police and the Armed Forces are permitted to enter any premises without a judicial order or the permission of the occupants. The constitutional rights to freedom of movement and peaceful association have also been suspended. Those who infringe the state of emergency legislation are tried under the military justice system.

Ecuador is party to the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and to the American Convention on Human Rights, which stipulate, under articles 4 and 27 respectively, that neither the right to life or the right not be tortured and ill-treated can be derogated under any circumstances.

Amnesty International recognizes that the Ecuadorean authorities are entitled to maintain law and order within the country. However, international and domestic human rights standards must be respected and the authorities should make it clear that abuses of fundamental human rights by the security forces will not be tolerated.

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

- expressing concern at the arbitrary detention of *Ciro Guzmán Aldas*, *Luis Villacis Maldonado* and *José Chávez* on 15 January 2000;
- urging the authorities to ensure that they are not ill-treated or tortured;
- expressing concern that it appears the three men have been detained solely because they called for the President to resign over the country's economic crisis;
- urging that they be charged with a recognizably criminal offence, or else immediately released;
- expressing concern at reports that other trade union and popular leaders are reportedly in imminent danger of being arbitrarily detained;

- urging the authorities to ensure that international and domestic human rights standards are fully respected during the present state of emergency.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

Dr. Jamil Mahuad Wit  
Presidente Constitucional de la República del Ecuador  
Palacio de Carondelet  
García Moreno 1043  
Quito  
ECUADOR

**Fax:** + 5932 580735/580142/580750/580716

**Salutation: Dear President**

**COPIES TO:**

Human rights organization  
Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos  
"Segundo Montes Mozo S.J."  
Montevideo 509 y Estados Unidos  
Casilla 17-08-8069  
Quito  
ECUADOR

and to diplomatic representatives of Ecuador accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 February 2000.