

UA 333/00 Death threats/Fear for safety

31 October 2000

MEXICO                    Felipe ARRIAGA SANCHEZ )  
                              Juan BAUTISTA VALLE )  
                              Servando BAUTISTA FUERTE )  
                              Jesús BAUTISTA FUERTE )  
                              Jesús CERVANTES LUVIANO ) Peasant environmentalists  
                              Luis TORRES )  
                              Abimando TORRES )  
                              Roberto CABRERA TORRES )  
                              Elías VALDEZ LUCENA )  
                              Miguel GARIBO HEREDIA )

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Peasant environmentalists (*campesinos ecologistas*) trying to protect the forests in Mexico's southern state of Guerrero from overexploitation are reportedly facing death threats from soldiers and so-called paramilitary groups. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

Activist Juan Bautista has reportedly said, "We've been accused of the lot, of being members of the [armed opposition group] EPR, of carrying weapons. All that's lies. The only thing we've done is protect the forests and water resources." ("*Nos han acusado de todo, de ser del EPR [un grupo alzado en armas], de portar armas. Todo eso es mentira. Lo único que hemos hecho es defender los bosques y el agua.*")

Juan Bautista is a founder member of the peasant environmentalist organisation *Organización de Campesinos Ecologistas de la Sierra de Petatlán y Coyuca de Catalán*. He was speaking at a 26 October meeting (*encuentro*) in Banco Nuevo, set up by the organisation. He and the other activists listed above told journalists, politicians and local and federal environment officials that soldiers and so-called paramilitary groups acting with their acquiescence were harassing and threatening to kill them.

A week before the meeting, on 18 October, the peasant environmentalists had led a march (*caravana*) to Banco Nuevo calling for the protection of Guerrero's forests and the release of environmentalist prisoners of conscience Rodolfo Montiel Flores and Teodoro Cabrera García (see UA 144/99, AI Index AMR 41/12/99, 25 June 1999). An officer commanding some 40 soldiers which intercepted the march claimed the soldiers were deployed to control drug-trafficking and apply the Federal Law on Firearms (*Ley Federal de Armas*). The environmentalists denied this, saying the troops were intent on stopping their lawful activities.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mexico's 1917 Constitution, introduced during the Mexican Revolution, sought to break up the estates of landowners (*hacendados*) by making provision for the creation of communal land holdings (*ejidos*), owned by peasant *ejidatarios*. However, a significant proportion of rural land holdings remained in private hands.

In 1992, however, a radical change to the Constitution allowed the land reforms to be reversed, by permitting *ejidos* to be sold or let to domestic and foreign corporations. Supporters of the change argued that it would benefit the *ejidatarios* economically. Critics argued that the opposite was true.

Logging operations have for long been conducted by *ejidatarios* and private landowners in Guerrero state. Boise Cascade, a USA-based corporation involved

in the manufacture of wood products, reported that in 1995 it began buying logs from *ejidatarios* and private landowners for processing in a Boise Cascade saw-mill in Guerrero, but that these operations were closed in 1998. A year later Mexican environmentalists claimed that Boise Cascade had signed a deal in 1995 with Ruben Figueroa Alcocer, a former Governor of Guerrero, for exclusive rights to purchase logs from *ejidos* in Guerrero. Months later Boise Cascade denied these claims.

Nevertheless, it was excessive logging which, in 1998, led to the formation of the *Organización de Campesinos Ecológicos de la Sierra de Petatlán y Coyuca de Catalán*. According to them excessive logging continues to this day, to the benefit of local political bosses protected by the military and so-called paramilitary groups.

Amnesty International takes no position on conflicts over the distribution or use of natural resources, or on the policies of governments and others with an interest in such resources. The organization, however, believes that the human rights of those involved in such conflicts, including their right to life, must be fully respected.

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

- expressing concern about reports that soldiers and members of so-called paramilitary groups have threatened to kill members of the *Organización de Campesinos Ecológicos de la Sierra de Petatlán y Coyuca de Catalán*;
- calling on the authorities to promptly investigate the death threats, make the findings public, and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that peasants concerned about the protection of the environment in Guerrero state may go about their legitimate activities free of intimidation.

**APPEALS TO:**

Attorney General of the Republic  
Lic. Jorge Madrazo Cuellar  
Procurador General de la República  
Av. Reforma, esq. Violeta, Col. Guerrero  
México D.F., 06300 MÉXICO

**Telegrams: Procurador General República, D.F., México**

**Faxes: + 52 5 346 0906**

**E-mails: ofproc@pgr.gob.mx**

**Salutation: Señor Procurador General/ Dear Attorney General**

Minister of Defence

Gral. Enrique Cervantes Aguirre  
Secretario de la Defensa Nacional  
Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional  
Blvd. Manuel Ávila Camacho esquina Avda. Industria Militar S/N  
Col. Lomas de Sotelo  
México D.F. 11640 MÉXICO

**Telegrams: Secretario Defensa Nacional, D.F., México**

**Faxes: +52 5 557 8963**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister**

Governor of Guerrero state

Lic. René Juárez Cisneros  
Gobernador del Estado de Guerrero

Palacio de Gobierno, segundo piso  
Plaza Central, Primer Congreso de Anahuac  
Col. Centro, Chilpancingo 39000  
Guerrero. MÉXICO

**Telegrams: Gobernador, Guerrero, México**

**Faxes: + 52 747 28319**

**Salutation: Señor Gobernador / Dear Governor**

Governmental National Human Rights Commission

Dr. José Luis Soberanes Fernández,

Presidente de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH),

Periférico Sur 3469, 5o piso, Col. San Jerónimo Lídice,

México D.F. 10200 MÉXICO

**Faxes: +52 5 681 9239/ 681 7199 / 135 0595**

**E-mails: correo@cndh.org.mx**

**Salutation: Estimado Dr. Soberanes / Dear Dr. Soberanes**

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental Human Rights organization

Centro de Derechos Humanos "Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez" A.C.

Serapio Rendon 57-B

Col. San Rafael

México D.F. 06470

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 12 December 2000.