

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 34/01/98

UA 02/98

Fear for safety

6 January 1998

**GUATEMALA Peasant farmers from the El Sauce community, El Estor, in the  
department of Izabal**

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the 80 or so people, many of them children, living in the El Sauce community. This follows reports that the man allegedly responsible for the death of a community member, Rosa Pec Chub, about a year ago (see UA 32/97, AMR 34/01/97, 30 January 1997), recently visited El Sauce, accompanied by several armed henchmen, and intimidated the community.

Fifty-seven-year-old Rosa Pec Chub was killed on 24 January 1997 when scores of heavily armed individuals - private security guards and other employees of a local landowner - entered the community of El Sauce firing indiscriminately.

Rosa Pec's son, Juan Rax Chub, was also injured in the incident and homes, crops and the community chapel were destroyed. Arrest warrants were subsequently issued against the local landowner, who reportedly fired the shots that killed Rosa Pec and injured her son, and against several other men involved in the attack.

Amnesty International believes the landowner acted with the complicity or acquiescence of the local authorities who failed to take appropriate steps to prevent the attack and to guarantee the safety of the peasants despite reports that they were aware such an attack could take place. They have also failed to enforce the arrest warrant issued against the landowner and several others or prevent further harassment by him and his private security guards of the El Sauce community (the warrant was suspended for some months but was reactivated in December 1997). Rumours, thought to be spread by workers on the estate, that a similar incident will occur continue to circulate within the community.

The landowner in question claims that the land occupied by the community belongs to him and in December 1997 filed charges against the community for appropriating the land. While Amnesty International takes no position on competing claims for land ownership, or on questions relating to judicial decisions relating to land tenure, the organization believes that the continuing campaign of harassment against the El Sauce community represents a deliberate attempt to intimidate the peasants into leaving the land and giving up their legitimate right to argue their case that they have a claim to this land.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Land activists and members of the church assisting them in arguing their case to retain lands also claimed by business interests, local officials or large landowners are frequently the victims of death threats and harassment by members of the security forces or private security guards. Amnesty International is seriously concerned about reports suggesting a pattern of intimidation against land activists in the municipality of El Estor, department of Izabal. During a demonstration for land by members of the El Estor community in June 1995, Carlos Lee Juc, a community activist from Rubelpec, El Estor, was knifed to death. A military commissioner allegedly wounded another peasant participating in the protest and threatened to kill three members of the community's human rights committee. Father Daniel Joseph Vogt, who supports the communities in their efforts, has been the victim of persistent but anonymous death threats. Other members of the parish have also been threatened and accused of being "guerrillas".

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

- calling for measures to fully guarantee the lives and physical integrity of all the inhabitants of El Sauce and members of the church who have been supporting them;
- expressing serious concern at the delays in the investigations into the attack on El Sauce a year ago in which Rosa Pec was killed and her son injured;
- calling on the authorities to bring to justice those responsible;
- expressing concern that in the community of El Sauce, El Estor, department of Izabal, armed private security guards appear to operate with impunity;
- urging the authorities to take steps to prohibit or disband any groups acting outside the law and calling on them to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Rodolfo Mendoza

Ministro de Gobernación, Ministerio de Gobernación

Despacho Ministerial, Of. No. 8

Palacio Nacional, 6a Calle y 7a Avda, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Faxes: + 502 251 5368**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

Attorney General

Lic. Héctor Hugo Pérez Aguilera

Fiscal General de la Nación, Ministerio Público

6a Avenida 3-11, Zona 4, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegrams: Fiscal General, Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Salutation: Sr. Fiscal / Dear Attorney General**

Governor of the Department of Izabal

Gobernador Departamental de Izabal

7 Calle y 1 Avenida, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Gobernador, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala**

**Faxes: + 502 948 0777 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")**

**Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor**

Izabal District Attorney

Lic. Ramón García Stany

Fiscal Distrital, Ministerio Público

Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Fiscal Distrital, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala**

**Salutation: Sr. Fiscal Distrital / Dear District Attorney**

**COPIES TO:**

COPREDEH

Lcda. Marta Altolaquirre

Presidente, Comisión Presidencial Coordinadora de la Política del Ejecutivo en Materia de Derechos Humanos, 13 Calle 15-33, Zona 13, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Faxes: + 502 334 1615 / 334 1407**

Sres., Parroquia San Pedro, 18003 El Estor, Izabal, Guatemala

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 February 1998.