

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety

18 September 1997

**MEXICO** Francisco Abarca Verales, peasant  
Florencia Abarca (f), aged 10  
Bernardo Sánchez Cruz, Catholic priest, human rights defender  
and several others

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Members of an indigenous community in Guerrero State recently raided by soldiers of the Mexican army, and members of a local human rights organization who have filed a complaint about the raid, are feared to be at risk of reprisals by the military.

On 1 September 1997, at around 4am, several members of the Mexican army raided the Indian community of Náhuatl de Ahuixtla, allegedly in search of guerrillas. Among others, they broke into the home of Francisco Abarca Verales, who was brutally beaten in an attempt to extract information from him. His 10-year-old daughter Florencia was also beaten by the soldiers. After protests from the villagers, the soldiers released their victims and left, threatening with death those who dared to lodge complaints against them.

Nevertheless, days later, community members sought help from the *Centro Regional de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos "José María Morelos y Pavón, A.C."*, Regional Centre for the Defence of Human Rights "José María Morelos y Pavón, A.C.", a local non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Chilapa, Guerrero State, led by Bernardo Sánchez Cruz, a Catholic priest. The NGO filed and published the community's complaint.

On 5 September, two Armoured Personnel Carriers of the Mexican army, led by an officer in charge of the local 50th Infantry Battalion, belonging to the 35th Military Zone, visited the offices of the NGO to request information about the complaint, purportedly to assist with official investigations. The NGO has protested about the intimidating way in which it was approached by the military authorities, whose own members have been accused of human rights violations, and fears for the safety of its members, as well as of those of the community of Náhuatl de Ahuixtla.

The Mexican Constitution bars the military jurisdiction from investigating crimes where the victims are civilians, regardless of whether the alleged perpetrators are military or not. Nevertheless, the military jurisdiction has continued to grant full impunity to all those members of the armed forces accused of human rights violations, and no one has yet been brought to justice. Amnesty International is therefore seriously concerned about the reported military investigation into the violations perpetrated in Náhuatl de Ahuixtla.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International has expressed deep concern about the growing activities of the Mexican armed forces, particularly the army, participating in security activities throughout the country, most of which are allegedly related to counter-insurgency operations. The organization has received a growing number of reports of serious human rights violations being committed with impunity during these operations, including scores of cases of arbitrary arrest, interrogation under torture, and even "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions. A growing number of victims of attacks and threats from the military are human rights defenders.

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

- expressing deep concern about the reported human rights violations by members of the Mexican army in the Indian community of Náhuatl de Ahuixtla, Guerrero State, and about the alleged intimidation of members of the *Centro Regional de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos "José María Morelos y Pavón, A.C."* for assisting the community;
- calling on the authorities to ensure full protection to all members of this community and the above-named human rights organization, politely requesting to be informed of what measures are taken;
- expressing serious concern about reports that the army is investigating complaints of human rights violations perpetrated by its own members, and calling for these to be investigated exclusively and effectively by the ordinary (civilian) jurisdiction and courts, as clearly established by the Mexican Constitution, and mandated by relevant international human rights standards.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) Interim Governor of the State of Guerrero

Ángel Heladio Aguirre Rivero

Gobernador Interino del Estado de Guerrero

Palacio de

Gobierno

Plaza Primer Congreso de Anahuac

39000 Chilpancingo, Guerrero, Mexico

**Telegrams: Gobernador Aguirre, Chilpancingo, Guerrero, Mexico**

**Faxes: + 52 747 23072 (voice line: ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")**

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

2) President of the National Human Rights Commission

Doctora Mireille Roccatti Velazquez

Comisión Nacional de

Derechos Humanos (CNDH)

Periférico Sur 3469

Col. San Jerónimo Lídice

10200 México D.F., MEXICO

**Telegrams: Sra. Roccatti, México D.F., MEXICO**

**Faxes: +52 5 681 7199**

**Salutation: Sra. Roccatti/ Dear Sra. Roccatti**

**COPIES TO:**

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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 1 November 1997.