

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 41/32/96

UA 166/96

"Disappearance" / Fear for safety

2 July 1996

**MEXICO** Margarito Sánchez Mérida, aged 35, environmental activist, teacher  
Hugolina Solís Vargas (f), wife of Margarito, teacher, environmental activist  
and other members of the Committee for the Defence of Grottos of  
Cacahuamilpa

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Margarito Sánchez Mérida has not been seen since 19 June 1996, when four members of the *Policía Judicial del Estado* (PJE), State Judicial Police, reportedly abducted him from the primary school in Cacahuamilpa, Guerrero state, where he was teaching. His attackers dragged him into a pick-up and drove off to an unknown location. According to a witness, the same vehicle was seen at the offices of the Judicial Police later that day.

Margarito Sánchez Mérida is one of the main directors and the administrator of *Comité Pro Defensa de las Grutas de Cacahuamilpa*, Committee for the Defence of Grottos of Cacahuamilpa, a non-governmental organization defending the National Park from privatization (see below). It is feared that Margarito Sánchez Mérida may have been abducted because of his active leadership role on behalf of this group.

On 30 March 1996 Margarito Sánchez Mérida was followed and harassed by four members of the PJE. They asked him personal questions about his wife, children and other relatives, in an apparent attempt to intimidate him into stopping his work on behalf of the community.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety of Margarito Sánchez Mérida, his wife, Hugolina Solís Vargas, who is President of the Committee, their children and relatives, and other members of the Committee.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

According to reports, the local authorities have stepped up pressure against the inhabitants of Cacahuamilpa, to force them to stop their opposition to the development of a tourist centre, run by a Canadian businessman, within the grottos. Margarito Sánchez Mérida and Hugolina Solís Vargas have been in the forefront of the opposition. Margarito Sánchez Mérida took part in negotiations with the state government, led by interim governor of Guerrero state, Angel Heladio Aguirre Rivero, on the issue of the National Park's privatization. The negotiations broke down on 12 October 1995. Since 21 March 1996 the Grottos have been administered by the municipal authorities supported by the Committee for the Defence of Grottos of Cacahuamilpa, against the will of the state Governor.

There have been other recent "disappearances" in Guerrero state. For example, on 26 January 1996 Angel Valdovinos Garza "disappeared" in Acapulco (see UA 45/96, AMR 41/11/96, 23 February 1996). His whereabouts remain unknown. In May 1995, Gilberto Romero Vázquez "disappeared" in the town of Atoyac de Alvarez.

A month later, on 28 June, 17 peasants travelling to Atoyac de Alvarez for a peaceful demonstration to call for his release, were massacred in an ambush staged by the state police and government officials from Guerrero (see UA 159/95, AMR 41/15/95, 5 July 1995, and follow-ups AMR 41/16/95, 26 July and AMR 41/18/95, 17 August).

An Amnesty International delegation, who visited Guerrero state from 4 to 6 June 1996, was able to confirm the reports of violent repression against human

rights workers, grassroots organizations and government critics who have been active in promoting and protecting the rights of the poorest sectors of the Mexican population, including peasants and indigenous. The organization believes that the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of human rights violations is the main reason for the intolerable persistence of these abuses against human right activists (for example, see UA 37/96, AMR 41/06/96, 15 February 1996; UA 45/96, AMR 41/11/96, 23 February 1996, UA 139/96, AMR 41/25/96, 10 June 1996 and EXTRA 91/96, AMR 41/26/96, 11 June 1996).

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

- expressing deep concern about the reported "disappearance" of Margarito Sánchez Mérida;
- calling for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation to establish his whereabouts, and asking to be kept informed of developments;
- seeking absolute guarantees of his physical safety if he is in detention;
- urging the government to take appropriate measures to protect Hugolina Solís Vargas, her children and relatives, and for effective measures to guarantee the safety of all other members of the Committee for the Defence of Grottos of Cacahuamilpa;
- expressing deep alarm about continuing human rights violations in the state of Guerrero, and the apparent lack of effective action to stop them and to end the impunity currently enjoyed by most perpetrators.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) President of the Republic

Lic. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León  
 Presidente de la República

Palacio Nacional, 06067 México D.F., MEXICO

**Telegrams: Presidente Zedillo, México D.F., México**

**Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme**

**Faxes: + 52 5 271 1764 but preferably to + 52 5 515 1794 or 542 1648 (voice line: ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")**

**Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President**

2) Minister of the Interior

Lic. Emilio Chuayffet Chemor  
 Secretario de la Gobernación  
 Secretaría de la Gobernación

Bucareli 99, 1er piso, Col. Juárez

06699 México DF, MEXICO

**Telegrams: Secretario Gobernación, México D.F., México**

**Faxes: + 52 5 515 1794/ 542 1648**

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

3) 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**

**COPIES TO:**

1) Daily newspaper  
Sr. Editor  
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2) Centro de DD.HH.  
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Puebla No 153, Col Roma  
06700 México DF, México  
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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 25 August 1996.