

URGENT ACTION

FORCED EVICTION OF COMMUNITIES IN GUATEMALA

In the Valle del Polochic, in north-eastern Guatemala, around 2,500 people from 12 rural communities have been forcibly evicted and have no shelter and no access to water and food. Around 60 more families are at risk of eviction.

Rural workers from the indigenous Q'eqchi' communities, in the Guatemalan department of Alta Verapaz, say that they have been living and working in 14 settlements for about 30 years, although a local company disputes the ownership of the land. A local judge issued an eviction order on 7 February 2011 against 14 communities. On 14 March, one day before the eviction was due to take place, the community and the authorities met to try to settle the dispute, but the community was not told that the eviction was due to take place the following day.

On 15 March, the police and the army forcibly evicted a farm called Miralvalle, following a failed mediation effort between the community and the authorities, regarding the possibility of harvesting some crops before leaving. According to some reports, the police and the army used teargas to carry out the eviction. **Antonio Beb Ac**, a member of the evicted community, was killed during the eviction and two people allegedly suffered from health complications because of teargas. On the same day, the authorities evicted a farm called Agua Caliente. On 16 March, the police and the army evicted a farm called Quinich and there are reports that the houses were set on fire. On 17 March, six further farms were evicted: Río Frío, Bellaflor, Ocho de Agosto, Los Recuerdos, Paraná, Santa Rosita. According to civil society reports, the Bellaflor and Ocho de Agosto communities were mistakenly evicted. On 18 March three further farms were evicted: El Sauce, Las Tinajas and Semau.

There are currently two further communities - San Miguelito and Campanas - at risk of being forcibly evicted. This would be another 60 families (300 people). Guatemala is a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and is therefore obliged to ensure that "evictions should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights".

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern that people have been forcibly evicted from the farms in Valle del Polochic, municipality of Panzós, in the Department of Alta Verapaz, without compliance to international standards;
- Calling for no further evictions to be carried out until Guatemala's obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are complied with: giving residents full and timely information about government proposals affecting their community, engaging in a genuine negotiation with the community to explore all alternatives to eviction, and where necessary, offering full compensation or alternative, adequate housing close to the existing community;
- Urging the authorities to carry out an impartial and thorough investigation into the death of Antonio Beb Ac, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 MAY 2011 TO:

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Carlos Menocal
Ministro de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1,
Ciudad de Guatemala,
GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2413 8658

Salutation: Dear Minister/Estimado Sr.Ministro

Minister of Agriculture

Ing. Juan Alfonso De León
Ministro de Agricultura y Ganadería
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería
7a avenida 12-90, zona 13, Edificio
Monja Blanca, Ciudad de Guatemala,
01013, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2413 7007

E-mail: despachosuperiormaga@gmail.com

Salutation: Dear Minister/ Estimado Sr. Ministro

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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