

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

GUATEMALA

Family of Héctor Reyes Pérez
Workers from the *Finca Nueva Linda* farm

Security guards have evicted protesting workers from Finca Nueva Linda, a plantation in southwest Guatemala. Amnesty International fears the evicted people may be in grave danger, as the security guards are reportedly searching the area for community leaders.

On 21 November security guards reportedly went into the plantation, firing into the air, and forcibly evicted approximately 150 people. Officers of the *Policia Nacional Civil* (PNC), National Civil Police, were reportedly in the area but did not intervene. During the eviction, security guards reportedly tried to seize Héctor Reyes Pérez's son but he managed to escape. Héctor Reyes Pérez, community leader and the farm administrator, remains disappeared since last 5 September 2003.

The farm owner's lawyer has claimed that the peasants left the farm peacefully. However, members of *Plataforma Agraria*, Agrarian Platform, an umbrella group of organisations working on land issues, went to the *Finca Nueva Linda* to talk with the workers when the eviction was finalising, heard shots being fired inside the plantation and found the workers had fled in fear for their lives. The evicted families are now sheltering in houses near the plantation.

Following the disappearance of Héctor Reyes the police investigations concluded that the farm's owner and head of security were the main suspects in his disappearance, but to date no charges have been brought against them by the *Fiscal Regional*, Local District Attorney. In protest, some 200 rural workers from surrounding communities occupied part of the *Finca Nueva Linda* in October 2003, and were violently evicted by approximately 1,000 police officers on 31 August 2004.

During the eviction eight rural workers (including a pregnant woman and three children) and four policeman were killed, many were injured and approximately 300 homes were destroyed. To date no charges have been brought with regard to police misconduct and use of excessive force, and it was to protest at this and demand compensation, as well as draw attention to the lack of progress in the investigation into the disappearance of Héctor Reyes, that workers reoccupied the farm on 28 October.

The government of President Berger, who came to power in January 2004, appears to be pursuing an unofficial policy of resolving ongoing land disputes by forcibly evicting families from farming land: there were 36 mass evictions during the first eight months of President Berger's administration, most of which involved police use of excessive force. Most of the families concerned were either protesting over unfair dismissal from farming jobs, or involved in disputes over land ownership.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Héctor Reyes Pérez's family and the workers evicted from the plantation on 21 November;
- calling for a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the alleged violence and police inaction during the eviction;
- calling for an investigation into alleged police use of excessive force during the 31 August eviction;

- calling for a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the apparent abduction of Héctor Reyes Pérez, with the results of all investigations made public and those found responsible brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Presidente de la República de Guatemala.

Licenciado Oscar Berger Perdomo

Casa Presidencial, 6 a. Avenida, 4-18 zona 1. Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2221 4423 / 2239-0090

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Berger

Attorney General

Fiscal General de la República y jefe del Ministerio Público

Juan Luis Florido

8a. Avenida 10-67, Zona 1, Antiguo Edificio del Banco de los Trabajadores,

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: + 502 2251 2218

Salutation: Estimado Fiscal General/Dear Sir

Minister of the Interior

Ministro de Gobernación

Carlos Vielman

6a.Avenida 4-64, zona 4, nivel 3.Ciudad de Guatemala. GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2362 0237

Email: ministro@mingob.gob.gt

Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Director General of the National Civil Police

Director General de la Policía Nacional Civil

Comisario General Gustavo Adolfo Dubon

6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1, 1er nivel

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2232 0224 (if voice answers, ask for "el tono de fax, por favor")

Email: pnc@pnc.gob.gt

Newspaper

Diario Prensa Libre

13 Calle 9-31, Zona I

Ciudad de Guatemala 01001

GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2251 8768

Agrarian Platform

Plataforma Agraria

6ª Avda. 2-30, Zona 1

Guatemala City, Guatemala

Fax: +502 2232 5841

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 4 January 2005.