

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

24 March 2004

HONDURAS

José Neptaly López (m)

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Osmán Alexander Blanco Duarte (m)

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Wilton René Blanco Duarte (m)

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Antonio Baquedano Ramos (m)

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José Medardo Reyes Mendoza (m)

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Activists, members of farming cooperative *Mártires de Guaymas*

Killed: Cesar Virgilio Pinot (m)

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Six members of a farming cooperative were attacked on 13 March, by gunmen reportedly working for an agricultural company, and one was killed. The five survivors are now in prison, but it is not known whether they have been charged. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for their safety, and they may be at further risk because they witnessed the killing of their colleague.

The group, from the *Mártires de Guaymas* cooperative, were attacked in the African palm plantations of Toloa Empalme, in the department of Atlántida, northern Honduras. Their attackers, armed with AK-47 assault rifles (illegal in Honduras), were reportedly private security guards employed by the Agro Oriental company. They shot and fatally wounded Cesar Virgilio Pinot, and wounded José Neptaly López. He and the others are now detained in the *Centro Penal* prison in Tela, also in the department of Atlántida.

Agro Oriental is a subsidiary of the transnational Tela Rail Road Company, which produces palm oil, and which is a subsidiary of the multinational Chiquita Brands International. The authorities have allegedly accepted the guards' explanation that they shot Cesar Virgilio Pinot in self-defence and have not initiated a proper investigation into the killing. The location of Cesar Virgilio Pinot's body has not been disclosed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Communities in the municipality of Tela have organized themselves into the Association of Independent Palm Producers (*Sociedad de Palmeros Independientes*) to work the land independently. This has led to a decrease in profits for Chiquita. Private security guards employed by Chiquita have reportedly been persecuting community leaders. There have also been reports that the local police have been colluding with these private security guards, who are thus able to act with complete impunity.

Amnesty International has been concerned before about the activities of security firms in Honduras. In 2001 community leader Carlos Roberto Flores was shot dead by security guards at a hydroelectric dam being built on the river Babilonia, in the municipality of Gualaco, Olancho department. None of them was ever brought to justice for the murder.

In October 2002, the Honduran National Congress approved a draft law presented in 1997 regulating the possession of firearms. Certain types of firearm, such as AK-47s, cannot be held by private individuals, including members of private security firms.

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

- calling on the authorities to release José Neptaly López, Osmán Alexander Blanco Duarte, Wilton René Blanco Duarte, Antonio Baquedano Ramos and José Medardo Reyes Mendoza immediately, unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;

- asking them to initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Cesar Virgilio Pinot, to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to investigate reports that private security firms have harassed and intimidated communities in Atlántida department;
- urging the government to ensure that the restrictions on possession of firearms by private individuals, including members of private security firms, are properly enforced.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Security

Dr. Oscar Alvarez, Ministro de Seguridad Pública
Ministerio de Seguridad Pública.
Edificio Poujol, 4o piso, Col. Palmira (Blvd. Morazán)
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Telegram: **Ministro de Seguridad,
Tegucigalpa, Honduras**

Fax: **+ 504 220 4352**

Salutation: **Dear Minister/Señor Ministro**

Attorney General

Sr. Ramón Ovidio Navarro Duarte, Fiscal General de la República
Fiscalía General de la República, Colonia Loma del Guijaro
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Telegram: **Fiscal General de la Republica,
Tegucigalpa, Honduras**

Fax: **+ 504 221 5666**

Salutation: **Dear Attorney General/ Señor Fiscal General**

President of Honduras

Lic. Ricardo Maduro
Presidente de la República de Honduras
Casa Presidencial, Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo
Palacio José Cecilio del Valle
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Telegram: **Presidente de Honduras,
Tegucigalpa, Honduras**

Fax: **+504 2214552**

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 May 2004.

COPIES TO:

National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights

Comisionado Nacional de Protección de los Derechos Humanos, Ramón Custodio López,
Avda. La Paz No. 2444, Contiguo a Galerías La Paz, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Fax: **+ 504 232 6894**

Special Prosecutor for Human Rights

Fiscal Especial de Derechos Humanos, Licda. Sandra Jamileth Ponce Aguilera
Colonia Loma del Guijaro, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Fax : **+ 504 2215620**

Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas (COPINH)

Barrio Lempira,
Intibucá, Honduras

Fax: **+504 783 0817 (if someone answers, ask for the fax: "me da tono de fax, por favor")**

e-mail: **copinh@hondutel.hn**

and to diplomatic representatives of Honduras accredited to your country.