

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

10 August 2004

MEXICO

Margarito de la Cruz Ortiz (m) ] Community leaders

Paulino Díaz (m) ]

Other members of the community of San Rafael, Metlatónoc municipality

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The two men named above are leaders of the indigenous community of San Rafael, an isolated mountain village in Guerrero state. The village was badly damaged in a landslide in 2003. They complained to human rights organisations about the authorities' failure to rehouse them, and on 5 August a group of soldiers and police came to the village, in an apparent attempt to intimidate the community.

Members of indigenous communities in Guerrero are particularly vulnerable to abuses by the army, such as arbitrary detention and in some cases ill-treatment. While the army captain in charge of the operation in San Rafael said that their mission was merely to gather information, Amnesty International believes that the large military and police operation was clearly intended to intimidate the community and raise the prospect of reprisals if the community continued with its campaign.

On the afternoon of 5 August 12 soldiers, 15 state police and a local prosecutor (*agente de ministerio público*) reportedly arrived in a convoy of vehicles. The army captain in charge asked community leaders if it was true that they had reported their case to human rights groups and asked to see the paperwork involved and the names of community leaders involved, including those named above and the director of the local human rights group, *Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan*, Abel Barrera Hernández.

A landslip in September 2003 left the 250 homes of San Rafael seriously damaged and many families homeless and sleeping in temporary shelters. Expert reports indicated that the homes, located in a geologically unstable site, were at serious risk of further collapse, particularly in the event of heavy rains or earth tremors. The reports recommended the affected parts of the community be urgently relocated to a more stable zone nearby. In November 2003 federal and state authorities set up a committee to fund this relocation. However, community leaders received no more information. During 2004 the community continued to protest at the lack of official action. Heavy rains in June and July threatened the safety of those families living in homes on the point of collapse. With help from the *Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan*, the community reported all this to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, and appealed to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights for protection measures (*medidas cautelares*).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The indigenous municipality of Metlatónoc in La Montaña region of Guerrero is one of the poorest in the whole of Mexico. Such communities are very isolated and are frequently ignored by state authorities, making their access to basic necessities like healthcare and education extremely precarious. In many parts of Guerrero the Mexican army carries out operations against drug producers and traffickers. There are regular reports of military patrols intimidating communities. The authorities rarely investigate such incidents, leaving communities extremely vulnerable and unwilling to lodge complaints. In recent years communities in the La Montaña region have enjoyed increasing contact with human rights organizations. The *Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan*, based in the main regional town of Tlapa, works closely with communities to guarantee their rights.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the community leaders named above, and for the community of San Rafael, in Metlatónoc municipality, Guerrero State, who were intimidated by police and soldiers on 5 August;
- calling for an impartial, prompt and full investigation into the role of military and police officials in the visit;
- asking the authorities to address the community's complaint that they do not have safe and adequate housing, and have a right to appeal to international human rights mechanisms without fear of reprisal in the face of inadequate official response to these demands.

**APPEALS TO:**

Governor of Guerrero

Lic. René Juárez Cisneros,  
Gobernador del Estado de Guerrero  
Palacio de Gobierno, segundo piso  
Plaza Central, Primer Congreso de Anahuac  
Colonia Centro, Chilpancingo 39000, Guerrero, Mexico  
**Fax: + 52 747 47 23125**  
**Salutation: Dear Governor/Señor Gobernador**

Minister for Social Development

Josefina Vázquez Mota  
Secretaría de Desarrollo Social  
Av. Paseo de la Reforma #116  
Colonia Juárez, 06600  
México, D.F., MEXICO  
**Fax: +52 55 5705 6656**  
**Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear Minister**

Minister of National Defence

Gral. Gerardo Clemente Ricardo Vega García  
Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional  
Bulevar M. Ávila Camacho esq. Industria Militar S/N  
Col. Lomas de Sotelo  
Delegación Miguel Hidalgo  
México D.F., C.P. 11640, MEXICO  
**Fax: +52 55 55578963**  
**Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear Minister**

Undersecretary for Human Rights

Daniel Cabeza de Vaca Hernández  
Asuntos Jurídicos y Derechos Humanos  
Secretaría de Gobernación  
Reforma 99, PISO 21, PH  
Colonia Tabacalera  
C.P. 06030  
Mexico D.F., Mexico  
**Fax: +5255 50 933492 (may be switched off outside office hours. If voice answers, ask "me da tono de fax, por favour")**  
**Salutation: Señor Subsecretario / Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

Human rights organisation

Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña "Tlachinollan" AC.,  
Calle Mina número 77, Colonia Centro, Tlapa de Comonfort Código Postal 41304, Guerrero, Mexico

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 21 September 2004.