

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 41/009/2001

UA 40/00

Fear for safety / arbitrary detention / possible
"disappearance"

14 February 2001

MEXICO Benjamín ROMERO UREIRO, student activist, aged 17

A student activist has not been seen since he "disappeared" in January. Amnesty International is concerned that he may have been arbitrarily detained and fears for his safety.

On the morning of 14 January, 17 year-old Benjamín Romero Ureiro left his student accommodation in the city of Morelia, the capital of Michoacán state, after telling a friend he was going to visit a fellow student at a nearby university residence. However, he never reached his destination and is believed to have been abducted on the way.

Benjamín Romero Ureiro and other student activists in Morelia had come under pressure from local state officials after they staged a number of demonstrations in late 2000 to protest at university conditions. They had received intimidating telephone threats, in which anonymous callers would order them to stop their protests. In November 2000, Benjamín Romero was briefly detained by the state police (*Policía Judicial del Estado de Morelos*) on his way home from a student meeting. He was reportedly ill-treated before the police let him go in a different part of town.

Benjamín Romero's family have filed a complaint about his "disappearance" with the Michoacán State Attorney General, (*Procuraduría General de Estado de Michoacán*), and the State Commission for Human Rights (*Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos de Michoacán*). The State Commission for Human Rights, an ombudsman body, are looking into the case.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over the past four decades, periods with significant numbers of reported "disappearances" in Mexico have alternated with periods of few such incidents. In the last four years, the number of reported "disappearances" have progressively diminished, although several hundred past "disappearances" have never been satisfactorily resolved (see *Mexico: "Disappearances" - a black hole in the protection of human rights*, AMR 41/05/98, May 1998; and *Mexico: Under the shadow of impunity*, AMR 41/02/99, March 1999).

On 1 December 2000 a new government led by President Vicente Fox Quesada of the National Action Party (*Partido de Acción Nacional*) took office in Mexico, ousting the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) after more than 70 years in power. In his inaugural speech, President Fox told Congress that "Mexico will no longer be held up as a bad example in matters of human rights. We will protect human rights as never before, respecting them as never before and seeking a culture that repudiates any violation and punishes the guilty." ("*México no será ya más una referencia de descrédito en materia de derechos humanos, vamos a protegerlos como nunca, a respetarlos como nunca y considerar una cultura que repudie cualquier violación y sancione a los culpables.*")

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

- expressing concern that Benjamín Romero Ureiro, a student activist in Michoacán State, has "disappeared";
- urging that if in detention, he be promptly brought before a judge and charged with a recognisable criminal offence, or be immediately released;
- urging the authorities to open a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation into his "disappearance" with the findings made public and those responsible brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Michoacán

Lic. Víctor Manuel Tinoco Rubí
Gobernador del Estado de Michoacán
Palacio de Gobierno,
Av. Madero No. 639
Morelia 58009
Estado de Michoacán
MEXICO

Fax: + 52 43 13 74 34

Salutation: Dear Governor / Señor Gobernador

Michoacán State Attorney

Lic. Jorge Eduardo García Torres
Procurador del Estado de Michoacán
Perférico Independencia, No. 5000
Morelia 58110
Estado de Michoacán
MEXICO

Fax: + 52 43 26 23 51 (if someone answers please say "por favor me da tono de fax")

Salutation: Dear Attorney / Señor Procurador

President of the State Human Rights Commission

Lic. J. Jesús Magaña Torres
Presidente de la Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos
Calle 15 de Octubre No 74
Col. Lomas de Hidalgo
Morelia
Estado de Michoacán
MEXICO

Fax: + 52 43 15 78 94

Salutation: Señor Mr President / Señor Presidente

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organization

Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan, A.C
Calle Mina No.26
Colonia Centro
CP 41304 Tlapa, Guerrero
MEXICO

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 28 March 2001.