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Threats / harassment

21 February 1995

MEXICO

José Alberto PANIAGUA MIJANGOS, seminarist  
Father Javier RUIZ VELAZCO

Father Samuel RUIZ, Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas  
and other members of the Catholic Church in Chiapas

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As tension mounts in the state of Chiapas, there is growing concern for the safety of members of the Catholic Church who are reported to be facing threats and harassment there.

On 4 February 1995, José Alberto Paniagua Mijangos, a seminarist in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, was reportedly followed by individuals in an unmarked car, believed to be members of the *Policía Judicial Federal, PJF*, Federal Judicial Police. He was allegedly threatened that he would suffer "misfortunes" ("*le sucederían desgracias*") if he continued with his pastoral work.

On 12 February, the PJF is reported to have interrupted mass and interrogated Father Javier Ruiz Velazco about his alleged link with armed opposition groups.

On 15 February, the PJF and members of the *Ministerio Público*, Public Ministry, are reported to have searched, with a warrant, the Church of Santo Jacinto in the municipality of Ocosingo. On the same day, the same group is reported to have raided the Convent of the Dominican Brothers and Sisters, this time without a search warrant. Members of the *Centro de Derechos Humanos "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas"*, a church-based human rights organization, have reported a heavy army presence near their offices in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

The tension is particularly acute around San Cristóbal de las Casas, where violence against members of the Catholic Bishopric mediating in the peace negotiations between the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and the Mexican government is reported to have increased since 9 February when President Zedillo called for the arrest of several EZLN leaders. Father Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas and a human rights activist who has played a fundamental role in the peace negotiations, has been the focus of many of the attacks. On 19 February, hundreds of landowners and other non-indigenous people demonstrated against Bishop Ruiz, hurling abuse, making threats and throwing stones, chairs and eggs against the doors of the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Press reports indicate that the police only intervened two hours after the incidents began. Father Ruiz received death threats during 1994 (see UA 102/94, AMR 41/05/94, 14 March 1994).

Members of the Catholic Church have been active in promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous populations of Chiapas for many decades. They have frequently encountered opposition from wealthy landowners and local authorities.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In his press statement of 9 February, President Ernesto Zedillo called for the arrest of several EZLN leaders, including sub-commander Marcos, whom he named as Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente. The President also named four other alleged EZLN leaders and arrest warrants were issued against all five and several others alleged to be EZLN members. Reports indicate that scores of people detained since President Zedillo's announcement have been tortured

or ill-treated by members of the security forces.

Amnesty International continues to fear that further human rights violations may occur in Chiapas. In the earlier armed clashes which began on 1 January 1994, at least 145 people are reported to have died before a cease-fire was called in mid-January 1994. Since 1 January 1994, Amnesty International has documented widespread human rights violations in the context of the ongoing conflict, including the summary execution of prisoners, extensive use of torture, and "disappearances" perpetrated by members of the Mexican Army. To date no member of the security forces has been brought to justice for these violations.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Spanish or in your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of José Alberto Paniagua Mijangos Father Javier Ruiz Velazco, Bishop Samuel Ruiz and other members of the Catholic Church in Chiapas, who continue to receive threats or are harassed apparently because of their work in the area;
- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee their safety and that those responsible for the threats are brought to justice;
- calling for an immediate end to the impunity from which the perpetrators of human rights violations in the context of the Chiapas conflict have thus far benefitted.

**APPEALS TO**

1) President of the Republic

Lic. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León  
 Presidente de la República  
 Palacio Nacional  
 06067 México D.F., MEXICO

**Telegrams: Presidente Zedillo, México D.F., Mexico**

**Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme**

**Faxes: + 52 5 271 1764**

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

2) Minister of the Interior

Lic. Esteban Moctezuma Barragán  
 Secretario de Gobernación  
 Secretaría de Gobernación  
 Bucareli 99, 1er. piso  
 Col. Juárez  
 06699 México DF, MEXICO

**Telegrams: Secretario Gobernación, México D.F, Mexico**

**Faxes: +52 5 566 8406**

**Salutation: Sr. Secretario/Dear Minister**

3) Minister of Defence

Gral. Enrique Cervantes Aguirre  
 Secretario de la Defensa Nacional  
 Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional  
 Blvd. Manuel Ávila Camacho y  
 Avda. Industria Militar  
 Col. Lomas de Sotelo  
 11640 México DF, MEXICO

**Telegrams: Secretario Defensa, México D.F., Mexico**

**Faxes: +52 5 557 1370 (voice line: ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")**  
**Salutation: Sr. Secretario/Dear Minister**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

1) Human rights organization  
Sres.  
Centro de Derechos Humanos  
San Bartolomé de las Casas  
5 de Febrero No. 6  
San Cristóbal de las Casas  
29200 Chiapas, Mexico

2) Daily newspaper  
Sr. Editor  
*La Jornada*  
Balderas 68  
06050 México D.F., 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 6 April 1995.