

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 255/94 (AMR 41/10/94, 1 July 1994) - Rape / Torture / Fear for safety and new concern: Death threats

MEXICO:María MÉNDEZ SANTIZ (f), aged 20) Tzeltal indigenous
Cristina MÉNDEZ SANTIZ (f), aged 18) women from Altamirano,
María MÉNDEZ SANTIZ (f), aged 16) Chiapas

new names:Cristina ORTIZ FERNÁNDEZ (f)) members of the indigenous
Lorenza GÓMEZ GONZÁLEZ (f)) artisan cooperative
Yolanda CASTRO (f)) "*J'pas Joloviletic*"

Human rights monitors, working on the case of the three Tzeltal indigenous women allegedly raped by members of the army in Chiapas, have reportedly been threatened and harassed by unidentified men.

On 1 July 1994, Cristina Ortiz Fernández, member of "*J'pas Joloviletic*", based in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, was approached by two men in civilian clothing who identified themselves as members of the army. They demanded to know the address and telephone number of Yolanda Castro, a human rights monitor and also member of the cooperative. They said that they needed her help as they did not speak the local language. When Cristina Ortiz refused to give them the information they wanted, they promised to return.

On 4 July, two unidentified men arrived at the cooperative store looking for Lorenza Gómez González, and demanding to talk to the president of the cooperative. The two men refused to explain the purpose of their questioning and requested to know the names of all the people working in the store. When the women refused, they promised to return later.

In a press release on 1 July, the *Secretaría de Defensa Nacional, SEDENA*, Ministry of National Defense, rejected the accusations of rape and ill-treatment of the three Tzeltal women named above. The press release stated that "...the Ministry of National Defense emphatically rejects the false imputations made against military personnel and reserves the right to legally proceed against any persons or entities slandering our institution" ("*...la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional rechaza enérgicamente las falsas imputaciones hechas a personal militar, reservándose el derecho de proceder legalmente en contra de las personas o entidades que difamen a nuestra institución*"). Local human rights organizations in Chiapas have expressed their concern at the veiled threat implied in this statement.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 19 May 1994, Yolanda Castro was intercepted by armed men in a street in San Cristóbal de las Casas. The men followed her when she ran off to the hotel where she and other women were staying. On arriving at the hotel, she discovered that their rooms and belongings had been searched. The cooperative has also received death threats over the phone and on three separate occasions, unidentified men have entered the cooperative store and arbitrarily searched the premises without giving any explanation.

The threats against Cristina Ortiz Fernández, Lorenza Gómez González and Yolanda Castro are the latest in a series of threats and attacks against human rights

monitors and indigenous leaders in Chiapas. In March 1994, two peasant leaders working with local Indian communities in negotiations between the Mexican Government and the EZLN were killed. Bishop Samuel Ruíz, a mediator in the conflict, has himself been threatened. André Aubry, his wife and other colleagues working in the collection of historical and anthropological information in the area, received death threats in June (see UA 102/94, AMR 41/05/94, 14 March 1994 and UA 209/94, AMR 41/09/94, 1 June 1994).

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

- expressing concern at the death threats and harassment against the three women, Cristina Ortiz Fernández, Lorenza Gómez González and Yolanda Castro;
- urging that an investigation into these allegations be conducted immediately and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- requesting that all necessary measures be taken to ensure the physical safety of all human rights monitors and indigenous leaders working in the area, and to continue to take all necessary steps to guarantee the safety of the three Tzeltal indigenous women from Altamirano and their relatives;
- noting the army's press release of 1 July, but urging the authorities to immediately and thoroughly investigate the allegations of rape and ill-treatment of María Teresa, Cristina and María Méndez Santiz.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of the Republic

Lic. Carlos Salinas de Gortari
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio Nacional
 06067 México D.F., Mexico

Telegrams: Presidente Salinas, México D.F., Mexico

Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme

Faxes: +52 5 271 1764

Salutation: Sr. Presidente/Dear President

2) Interior Minister

Dr Jorge Carpizo McGregor
 Secretario de Gobernación
 Secretaría de Gobernación
 Bucarelli 99, 1er piso
 Colonia Juárez
 06669 México DF, MEXICO

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

Telexes: 1774376, 1774375

Faxes: +52 5 592 0014

Salutation: Sr. Secretario de Gobernación/Dear Minister

3) Attorney General's Office

Lic Humberto Benítez Treviño
 Procurador General de la República
 Procuraduría General de la República
 Paseo de la Reforma y Violeta
 Colonia Guerrero
 06300 Mexico DF, MEXICO

Telegrams: Procurador General, Mexico D.F., Mexico

Telexes: 1777572

Faxes: +52 5 526 8506

Salutation: Sr Procurador General/Dear Attorney General

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

1) National Human Rights Commission

Sres.

Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos

Periférico Sur 3469

Col San Jerónimo Lídice

10200 México DF, Mexico

2) Human rights organization

CONPAZ - Coordinación de organismos

no gubernamentales por la paz en Chiapas

Chapa de Corzo 19

El Cerrillo, San Cristóbal de las Casas

29220 Chiapas, Mexico

3) Daily newspaper

Sr. Editor

Reforma

Reforma 295, 9 piso

06170 México DF, 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 16 August 1994.