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Fear for safety

4 July 1995

MEXICO

Bishop Arturo LONA REYES, human rights activist

On 29 June 1995, the car in which Bishop Arturo Lona Reyes was travelling was shot at by two masked men who approached his vehicle and fired several times.

During the past 10 years Arturo Lona Reyes, who is Bishop of Tehuantepec and a well-known human rights activist in that region of Oaxaca state, is reported to have received death threats on six separate occasions before this latest attack. All the threats were reportedly as a result of his activities on behalf of the human rights of the region's poor and dispossessed, particularly the indigenous.

Amnesty International fears that another attempt may be made on his life, particularly in view of the current wave of attacks and threats against members of the Catholic Church in Mexico.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members of the Catholic Church and other grassroots organizations have been active in promoting and protecting the rights of the indigenous population, for many decades. They have frequently encountered opposition from the local authorities and large landowners. Since the 1 January 1994 uprising in Chiapas, church and human rights activists monitoring the human rights situation in states with large indigenous minorities, especially Chiapas, have faced a series of threats and attacks.

On 22 June 1995, Father Rodolfo Izal Erloz, a Spanish national, Father Loren Rieve Estrella, a US national, and Father Jorge Barón Gutlein, an Argentine national, were arrested without warrant by members of the Republic Attorney General's office. The first two priests had received death threats in the recent past, apparently for working with the local indigenous population. The priests were arrested following unspecified complaints from neighbours and for allegedly infringing migration laws. Following their arrest their whereabouts were not known for a number of hours. On 23 June were deported back to their respective countries (see UA 148/95, AMR 41/12/95, 23 June, and follow-up).

On 30 June all clergy working for the Dioceses of San Cristóbal de las Casas, were ordered by local authorities to present their documentation at the immigration office. Following these events and fearing further harassment, 15 members of the clergy, presented a writ of *habeas corpus* (*recurso de amparo*) to the District judge in Tuxla Gutierrez, state of Chiapas, requesting protection against a possible detention.

Father Samuel Ruiz, committed human rights activist and Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, state of Chiapas, received a number of death threats, which it is believed were motivated by his work on behalf of indigenous populations in southern Mexico (see UA 102/94, AMR 41/05/94, 14 March 1994 and UA 46/95, AMR 41/10/95, 21 February 1995).

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of Arturo Lona Reyes following the attack against him on 29 June 1995;
- calling for a prompt and thorough investigation into the attack and for those responsible to be brought to justice:
- urging the government to take immediate measures to guarantee Bishop Lona's safety and the safety of all human rights activists and church members in Mexico, particularly in the Dioceses of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic

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

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

Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme

Faxes: + 52 5 271 1764

Salutation: Sr. President/Dear President

2) Minister of the Interior

Lic. Emilio Chuayffet Chemor
Secretario de la Gobernación
Secretaría de la Gobernación
Bucareli 99, 1er piso
Col. Juárez
06699 México DF, MÉXICO

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

Faxes: + 52 5 592 0584; 592 0014

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
Avdaa. Industria Militar
Col. Lomas de Sotelo
11640 México D-F-. MEXICO

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

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 Cristobal de las Casas
29200 Chiapas, México

2) Daily newspaper

Sr. Editor
La Jornada

Balderas 68
06050 México D.F., México

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 1995.