

UA 193/99 Fear for Safety / Death threats / Arbitrarydetention.**MEXICO**Members of El Portal community

Genaro Gutiérrez Aguilar - detained
Ramiro de León de León - detained
Luis Zunun Martínez - detained
Elfego Zunun Martínez - detained

Amnesty International fears for the safety of members of the community of El Portal, in the Autonomous Municipality of Tierra y Libertad, in Chiapas State, after they were attacked, apparently by supporters of the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), Institutional Revolutionary Party. Police were apparently present but did nothing to stop the attack.

According to information received by Amnesty International, on 14 July 1999 members of El Portal community - some of whom also are part of the *Frente de Organizaciones Campesinas Indígenas* (FOCI), Indigenous Peasant Organization Front - reconnected their water supply, which had been cut off for the previous four months. As they were returning to their houses, a crowd of PRI supporters, allegedly armed with guns and machetes, started throwing stones at them. The PRI supporters fired at people running away and beat those who did not escape. They also threatened to burn them alive.

Apparently, several members of the *Policía Seguridad Pública* (Public Security Police) were present but did not intervene to stop the attacks and threats. However they apparently arbitrarily detained 20 FOCI members. The police interrogated these people, about whom are the heads of the organization. Sixteen of the detainees were subsequently released but four of them, Genaro Gutiérrez Aguilar, Ramiro de León de León, Luis Zunun Martínez, and Elfego Zunun Martínez, were charged with various crimes and transferred to a prison, the *Centro de Readaptación Social No.5*.

Four people were gravely injured in these attacks, one of whom had to have a leg amputated. Residents affiliated to the FOCI left in the community reportedly received an ultimatum from the PRI supporters that their houses would be burnt down if they did not leave by 30 July 1999.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has long been documenting reported acts of violence by members of the Mexican authorities against alleged supporters of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), Zapatista National Liberation Army, in the state of Chiapas. Last year saw a spate of military operations against supposed EZLN members in the communities of Taniperla, Diez de Abril, Amparo Aguatinta, Nicolás Ruiz, and El Bosque, all in the state of Chiapas. This culminated in the arrest of 167 people in Nicolás Ruiz - most of whom have since been released without charge - in an operation which lasted six hours and involved hundreds of police and soldiers in June 1998.

In the light of these and similar actions the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights concluded, in a 1998 report, that "the emergence of new dissident armed groups of various types [in Mexico] has led not only to a resumption of measures of control by the security forces but also to the indiscriminate repression of social organizations and leaders".

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

- expressing concern for the safety of members of El Portal community, in the municipality of Tierra y Libertad, Chiapas State, and calling on the authorities to take adequate measures to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a thorough, prompt, and independent investigation into the armed attacks and death threats against members of the Autonomous Municipality of Tierra y Libertad, and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to bring recognizable criminal charges against Genaro Gutiérrez Aguilar, Ramiro de León de León, Luis Zunun Martínez, and Elfego Zunun Martínez, or to promptly release them;
- urging the authorities assure that the detainees have access to lawyers, doctors and their families.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of the State of Chiapas

Lic. Roberto Albores Guillén

Gobernador del Estado de Chiapas

Palacio de Gobierno, Piso 1, Col. Centro, 29000

Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Estado de Chiapas, MEXICO

Telegrams: Gobernador del Estado, Chiapas, México

Faxes: + 52 961 20917

Salutations: Sr. Procurador / Dear Governor

Attorney General of Chiapas

Lic. Jorge Hernández Aguilar

Procurador General de Chiapas

Procuraduría General de Chiapas

Tuxtla Gutierrez, Estado de Chiapas, MEXICO

Telegrams: Procurador del Estado, Chiapas, México

Faxes: + 52 961 65376 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Sr. Procurador / Dear State Attorney General

COPIES TO:

"Fray Bartolomé de las Casas" Human Rights Organization

Francisco León 5, Barrio de Santa Lucía

San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 29250, México

Faxes: + 52 967 83551

E-mails: cdhbcasas@laneta.apc.org

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 10 September 1999.