

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 41/21/94

Distr: UA/SC

17 November 1994

UA 405/94 Fear of torture/ fear of "disappearance"/death threats

Mexico Armín Luna Jiménez, peasant activist
José Teodomiro Damas, peasant activist
Ricardo Villanueva López, peasant activist
Mario Landeros Cárdenas, leader of the Coordinadora Campesina Indígena XI'NICH,
Ant's March Indian Peasant's Union

and dozens of other members of the Ch'ol and Tzeltal Indian communities.

Amnesty International is concerned about the safety of dozens of Ch'ol and Tzeltal Indian activists whose whereabouts remain unknown after their arbitrary arrest on the morning of 16 November during a peaceful demonstration in the town of Palenque, Chiapas.

According to reports, Indian peasants from the communities of Patricio, Sabana Perdida and El Naranjo, near Palenque, were violently evicted and arbitrarily arrested when scores of local powerful landowners and their armed guards, dozens of members of the Chiapas state police and municipal officials dispersed the demonstration held in the central square of Palenque.

During the attack, men, women and children were reportedly beaten and forced into trucks which drove the detainees out of town. Dozens were released later during the day, but the whereabouts of 70 detainees, mostly men, including José Teodomiro Damas, Armín Luna Jiménez and Ricardo Villanueva López, remain unknown. They are feared "disappeared", and might suffer torture or ill-treatment. Mario Landeros Cárdenas, an Indian leader and human rights activist, was brutally beaten. His hair was cut off and he was dragged and kicked around the central square of the town during the incident. In addition, his car and home were reportedly destroyed by the attackers, and he was threatened with death.

According to reports, the authorities have failed to adopt measures for the protection of the victims, and carry out an immediate and effective investigation to bring those responsible to justice.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has followed the serious human rights situation affecting thousands of Indian peasants in Southern Mexico for many years. In 1992 it published **Mexico: Human rights violations against Ch'ol and Tzeltal Indian activists** (AI Index: AMR 41/05/92), which described a pattern of gross human rights violations against Indian peasants in Palenque very similar to the case described above. Although the authorities acknowledged that scores had been arbitrarily arrested and tortured during a peaceful demonstration in Palenque in December 1991, those responsible were never brought to justice.

Since the uprising of Indian peasants demanding land and other rights in Chiapas on 1 January 1994, Amnesty International has documented scores of cases of

gross human rights violations by the Mexican army in Chiapas, including torture, extra-judicial executions and "disappearances". To Amnesty International's knowledge, nobody has been brought to justice. In October, the organization sent a memorandum to Mr. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, the elected President of Mexico taking power in December, expressing the organization's concerns on Mexico in general and Chiapas in particular. Among dozens of recommendations for his future government, the organization underlined the urgency of ending a longstanding policy of impunity for the perpetrators of human rights violations.

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

-expressing grave concern about the reported "disappearance" of scores of Indian peasants, including women and children, following their arbitrary and violent arrest during a peaceful demonstration in Palenque on 16 November 1994, and underlining the fear for the safety of those in detention;

- expressing alarm about the death threats and attack suffered during the incident by Mario Landeros Cárdenas, an Indian leader and human rights activist allegedly targeted for his peaceful activities on behalf of the Indian peasants, and grave concern about the whereabouts of Indian peasant activists Armin Luna Jiménez, José Teodomiro Damas and Ricardo Villanueva López.

-expressing alarm about the apparent failure of the authorities to prevent and stop such an attack and requesting information about the measures adopted for the full investigation of the incident in order to bring those responsible to justice and prevent the recurrence of human rights violations against the Indian peasant population.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic

Lic. Carlos Salinas de Gortari

Presidente de la República

Palacio Nacional

06067 México D.F., México

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

Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme

Faxes: + 52 5 271 1764

Salutation: Sr. Presidente/Dear President

PLEASE NOTE: As from 1 December new President:

Lic. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

CONPAZ

Chiapa de Corzo 19

El Cerrillo

C.P. 29220

San Cristóbal de las Casas

Chiapas - Mexico

Fax: +52 967 80272

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 31 December 1994.