

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 41/021/2005

UA 175/05

Fear for safety/threats

24 June 2005

MEXICO

Workers at the newspaper *Noticias*, Oaxaca

Workers at the newspaper *Noticias*, in the southern city of Oaxaca, have been threatened and intimidated by members of a trade union controlled by the state government. The union is picketing the newspaper's office in the city of Oaxaca in an apparent attempt to close the publication, which supports a coalition of local opposition parties.

At 2am on 17 June up to 300 members of the Workers and Peasants' Revolutionary Confederation (*Confederación Revolucionario de Obreras y Campesinos* (CROC), which is officially led by a local parliamentary deputy of the ruling party in Oaxaca, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), began a picket of the *Noticias* offices. The CROC members, who are reportedly armed with sticks and pistols, have control of the exits to the building and have blocked the surrounding streets. They reportedly threatened the 31 staff who were in the offices at the time. They have cut the electricity supply to the building twice, and at night CROC members reportedly kick the door shouting "we are going to get in and beat you up" (*vamos a entrar para romperles la madre*).

Staff inside the building say they have called the state police repeatedly for assistance, but they have failed to intervene or guarantee the safety of those inside. *Noticias* staff also claim that local police in plain clothes are among the CROC members encouraging the action. One of the people who live near the *Noticias* offices reportedly complained about the actions of the CROC, but the police said they had been given orders not to intervene.

Of the 130 *Noticias* staff, 102 are members of CROC, but none are reportedly taking part in the CROC action, which was instigated by the CROC leadership against the express wishes of the *Noticias* workforce. Despite this, CROC, the local authorities and other local newspapers have presented the CROC picket as legitimate industrial action.

Noticias is the only newspaper in Oaxaca which has been consistently critical of the state administration. The newspaper's warehouses were attacked and occupied shortly after the governor was elected, in an apparent reprisal for the newspaper's support for the opposition candidate.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Officially recognised trade unions in Mexico remain largely under state control, a legacy of the 70 years of authoritarian rule by the PRI, which lost power at national level in 2000. These unions are frequently used to prevent the establishment of independent trade unions or to enforce agreements imposed by management or local governments. When members of these unions commit abuses they are frequently not investigated.

The rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights has deteriorated in Oaxaca under the present state administration. The local government controls the state judiciary, police and legislature, and has apparently sought to strengthen its control over other elements of society, seeking to co-opt or coerce opposition political parties and indigenous organisations. During this period, Amnesty International has documented use of excessive force and ill-treatment by the state police, as well as politically motivated criminal charges against social and opposition activists and refusal by the state authorities to effectively prevent or investigate such abuses.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to guarantee the safety of the staff of the newspaper *Noticias*;

- calling on them to investigate the threats and intimidation of *Noticias* staff and the apparent involvement of state agents in the CROC picket, and to bring those responsible to justice;
- expressing concern that the CROC picket appears to be sponsored by the state authorities in order to prevent the publication of the newspaper, and reminding the authorities that they are obliged to guarantee freedom of expression in Oaxaca.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Oaxaca

Ulises Ruiz Ortiz

Gobernador del Estado de Oaxaca

Carretera Oaxaca, Puerto Angel, Km. 9.5

Santa María Coyotopec, C. P. 71254, Oaxaca, Oaxaca, MEXICO

Fax: + 52 951 511.6879 (if someone answers, ask "tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Señor Gobernador/Dear Governor

Attorney General of Oaxaca

Lic. Patricia Villanueva Abraján

Procuradora del Estado de Oaxaca

Avenida Luis Echeverría s/n, La Experimental

San Antonio de la Cal, C. P. 71236, Oaxaca,

Oaxaca, MEXICO

Fax: +52 951 511 5519

Salutation: Estimada Procuradora/Dear Attorney General

Director of Human Rights – Federal Interior Ministry

Maestro Ricardo Sepúlveda

Secretaría de Gobernación

Reforma 99, PISO 21, PH

Colonia Tabacalera

C.P. 06030, Mexico D.F. MEXICO

Fax: + 52 55 5128 0234 (if someone answers, ask "tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Estimado Maestro/Dear Sir

Interior Minister of Oaxaca State

Lic. Jorge Franco Vargas

Secretario de Gobierno

Constitución 519,

Esq. Mártires de Tacubaya,

Oaxaca, Oaxaca, MEXICO

Fax: +52 951 132 5378

Salutation: Estimado Secretario/Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

State Human Rights Commission of Oaxaca

Lic. Jaime Pérez Jiménez, Presidente de la Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos, Calle de los Derechos Humanos No. 210, Colonia América, C. P. 68050, Oaxaca, 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 5 August 2005.