

MEXICO Members of El Paraíso community, municipality of Yajalón Other communities at risk of paramilitary attacks in Chiapas state

In the run up to the Chiapas state elections, communities that do not support the government are being attacked by a paramilitary group reported to be affiliated to the ruling party, the PRI. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that these communities will face further attacks during the 20 August elections and for some time afterwards.

The paramilitary group *Paz y Justicia*, Peace and Justice, attacked the community of El Paraíso on 3 August, forcing the villagers to flee. The authorities have been slow to respond, and reportedly have not issued a single arrest warrant. More than 90 families are still hiding in the mountains, fearing further violence if they return to their homes.

Like other paramilitary groups in Chiapas, *Paz y Justicia* is reportedly affiliated to the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), Institutional Revolutionary Party. The inhabitants of El Paraíso, in Yajalón municipality, are supporters of the armed opposition group *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), Zapatista National Liberation Army.

On 9 August a joint police-military operation went to El Paraíso, reportedly to search for paramilitaries. However, according to reports from indigenous women in a neighbouring village, they were accompanied by two of the local leaders of *Paz y Justicia*. These and other alleged paramilitaries were reportedly used as translators by officials from the Attorney General's Office, *Procuraduría General de la República* (PGR), when they questioned the women the same day. There were no arrests.

Human rights defenders and journalists who have visited the area report being threatened by the authorities and paramilitaries. Activists from the Network of Community Defenders, *Red de Defensores Comunitarios*, a non-governmental human rights organisation, have been at particular risk since they began reporting the latest human rights violations committed by paramilitaries.

Amnesty International receives frequent reports of harassment and intimidation by the army, police and paramilitary groups. *Paz y Justicia* has reportedly threatened to attack the community of La Revolución, in the municipality of Tila, and force the inhabitants out of their homes. Many villagers avoid working their land or going to the market for fear of further attacks.

The authorities have failed to take concerted action to uphold the rule of law in Chiapas. The impunity enjoyed by paramilitaries and others responsible for human rights violations gives them free rein to continue their criminal activities and increases the fear and tension in indigenous communities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Paz y Justicia, which emerged in 1995, is one of the main paramilitary organisations operating in Chiapas since the Zapatista guerrillas took up arms in January 1994. The attack on El Paraíso is the latest in a series of human rights violations attributed to paramilitaries in Chiapas, including the massacre of 45 indigenous men, women and children in Acteal in December 1997 by paramilitaries from Chenalhó. There are clear indications that the

authorities supplied arms to those who carried out the massacre, and failed to intervene while the savage attack was taking place.

For many years, Amnesty International has documented the systematic pattern of human rights violations against the indigenous and peasant communities of Chiapas state by the security forces and paramilitary groups. The security forces' unspoken support for PRI sympathisers increases the political violence and divisions in the communities.

The elections in Chiapas, traditionally a PRI stronghold, represent the party's first test since it lost the presidential elections on 2 July, after 71 years in power.

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

- expressing concern at the actions of paramilitary groups in Chiapas, including the attack on El Paraíso in Yajalón;
- expressing concern at the apparent collusion between security forces in the area and paramilitary groups, which guarantees impunity for the perpetrators of human rights violations;
- urging the authorities to carry out immediate, thorough and impartial investigations into these abuses, to make the results public and to bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee the safety of those displaced by paramilitary groups, other communities at risk of attack, and human rights defenders and journalists reporting on the situation;
- urging that all operations by the security forces are carried out in line with international human rights standards.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of the State of Chiapas
 Lic. Roberto Albores Guillén
 Gobernador del Estado de Chiapas
 Palacio de Gobierno, Piso 1
 Col. Centro, Tuxtla Gutiérrez 29000
 Chiapas, MÉXICO

Telegrams: Gobernador, Chiapas, México

Faxes: +52 961 20917

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

Attorney of the State of Chiapas
 Lic. Eduardo Montoya Liévano
 Procurador del Estado de Chiapas
 Procuraduría General del Estado de Chiapas
 Libramiento Norte s/n, Infonavit El Rosario
 Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, MÉXICO

Telegrams: Procurador, Chiapas, México

Faxes: +52 961 65724

Salutation: Sr. Procurador / Dear Attorney General

Attorney General of the Republic
 Lic. Jorge Madrazo Cuellar
 Procurador General de la República
 Av. Reforma, esq. Violeta, Col. Guerrero
 México D.F., 06300 MÉXICO

Telegrams: Procurador General República, D.F., México

Faxes:+ 52 5 346 0906

E-mails:ofproc@pgr.gob.mx

Salutation:Señor Procurador General/ Dear Attorney General

Governmental National Human Rights Commission

Dr. José Luis Soberanes Fernández,

Presidente de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH),

Periférico Sur 3469, 5o piso, Col. San Jerónimo Lídice,

México D.F., 10200 MÉXICO

Faxes:+52 5 681 9239/ 681 7199 / 135 0595

E-mails:correo@cndh.org.mx

Salutation:Estimado Dr. Soberanes / Dear Dr. Soberanes

COPIES TO:

Non-governmental Human Rights Organization

Centro de Derechos Humanos "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas",

Calle Cuauhtémoc 12, Centro Histórico,

San Cristóbal de Las Casas 29200,

Chiapas, 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 27 September 2000.