

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 41/44/96

UA 201/96

Fear for safety

14 August 1996

**MEXICO Ofelia Medina(f), human rights defender
(Chiapas) Father Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas**

**Rafael Vera, auxiliary bishop
and other human rights defenders**

Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of human rights defenders and church members in the state of Chiapas, including those named above, following an increasing number of threats against them. There are fears that a growing number of community activists could be targeted in the near future.

On 26 July and 5 August 1996, Ofelia Medina, a human rights defender working on a project for indigenous children, received a series of anonymous threatening phone-calls which indicated that she was being closely followed. The caller identified himself as José Hernández and reportedly said: "*Cuidate, cuidate te van a chingar*" - "Be careful, they are going to kill you". The caller warned her that she could be run over by a truck or be framed for possessing drugs.

On 2 August 1996, the car in which Bishop Samuel Ruiz was travelling, was the subject of an attempted attack by unknown persons in Chamula, an impoverished area of Chiapas. Monsignor Samuel Ruiz is a human rights activist playing a key role in the current peace negotiations between the government and the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), Zapatista National Liberation Army, a political opposition group. He has been the focus of many attacks in recent years (see UA 46/95, AMR 41/10/95, 21 February 1995, UA 102/94, AMR 41/05/94, 14 March 1994 among others).

Rafael Vera, auxiliary bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas State has also recently been threatened, allegedly by someone who also identified himself as José Hernández.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International delegations visited Chiapas in January 1994, January 1995 and June 1996. As a result of these research visits, the organization has recorded a long-term pattern of threats, intimidation and violent repression against human rights workers active in promoting and protecting the rights of the poorest sectors of the population. The failure to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations and the lack of effective action to stop them and to end such impunity has apparently helped to fuel an increasing number of threats and attacks against human rights defenders and peasant activists.

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

- condemning the threats against Ofelia Medina, Father Samuel Ruiz and Rafael Vera, reportedly threatened in connection with their activities on behalf of the indigenous community;
- expressing concern for the safety of Ofelia Medina, Father Samuel Ruiz and Rafael Vera, and other human rights defenders in Chiapas, urging a prompt and full investigation into these threats and asking to be kept informed of any findings;

- expressing deep alarm about the continuing human rights violations in the state of Chiapas;
- asking what action is currently being taken to put a stop to these incidents and to end the impunity currently enjoyed by most perpetrators.

APPEALS TO:

1) Governor of the State of Chiapas

Lic. Julio César Ruiz Ferro
Gobernador del Estado de Chiapas
Palacio de Gobierno
Av. Central y Primera Oriente
Colonia Centro, 29009 Tuxtla Gutiérrez
Estado de Chiapas, MEXICO

Telegrams: Gobernador Ruiz Ferro, Chiapas, México

Faxes: +52 961 20917 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador/Dear Governor

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 DF, México

Faxes: + 52 5 546 5350

Salutation: Sr. Secretario/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organization

Comisión de Derechos Humanos "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas"
Apartado postal 178
San Cristóbal de las Casas
29250 Chiapas

Fax: +52 967 835 51

E-mail: cdh-bcasas@laneta.org.apc

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 18 September 1996.