

MEXICO Indigenous communities in Chiapas state

Amnesty International is profoundly concerned that increased armed operations in and around a number of indigenous communities in the northern region of Chiapas state, following a reported ambush in the area, could result in a wave of armed attacks.

One person was reportedly killed and several injured in the ambush, on 13 December 1998, near the community of Los Plátanos in the municipality of El Bosque. It is not clear who is responsible.

One of the consequences of the attack, however, has been an increased presence of security forces in El Bosque and the surrounding communities. This has fuelled fears amongst residents that the resulting tensions could lead to further armed attacks, from either paramilitary groups working with the acquiescence of the authorities or police and army units. Some indigenous community members have already begun to flee the region in anticipation of this.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The mounting tensions come on the first anniversary of the massacre, on 22 December 1997, of 45 unarmed men, women and children in the indigenous community of Acteal, Chiapas state. This caused an international outcry and resulted in the human rights situation in the region being put on the agenda of the international community, including those of human rights monitoring mechanisms attached to the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

Compelling evidence showed that the authorities facilitated the arming of the paramilitaries who carried out the Acteal killings and failed to intervene during the attack.

Although the *Procuraduría General de la República*, Attorney General's office, acknowledged almost a year ago that a number of paramilitary groups were active in Chiapas, no concrete action has been taken to put an end to their activities.

Reports from numerous sources, including human rights groups and journalists, indicate that paramilitary groups have continued to operate in the region and have reportedly been responsible, in the last month, for the deaths of five peasants in Chiapas. In a separate incident involving the military, three indigenous peasants were wounded by soldiers while protesting at the detention by the army of members of their community in Chenalhó, near the site of the Acteal massacre.

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

- expressing concern that the protection of human rights in the northern region of Chiapas state is in jeopardy, following an ambush on 13 December 1998 near the community of Los Plátanos, municipality of El Bosque, Chiapas state, in which one person was reported killed and several injured;
- expressing concern at reports that paramilitary groups working with the acquiescence of the authorities continue to operate in the region;
- acknowledging that the authorities have a duty to maintain law and order and that this role must always be conducted according to international human rights standards;

- reminding the authorities of their commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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

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

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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 29 January 1999.