

UA 296/01

Fear for

MEXICO Manuel Gómez Hernández (m)] Human Rights Defenders
Juan Gómez Hernández (m)] and Brothers
Members of the Gómez Hernández family
Members of the indigenous community of Colonia Los Angeles, Chiapas, south
Mexico

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of human rights defenders and brothers, Manuel and Juan Gómez Hernández, their families and local community. The brothers have reportedly received death threats and are also being kept under surveillance by people linked to the local *cacique* (local political boss) in Colonia Los Angeles, Chiapas, south Mexico.

Manuel and Juan Gómez Hernández work closely with *Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Fray Bartolome de las Casas'*, (CDHFBC), the Human Rights Centre 'Fray Bartolome de las Casas' and have spoken out against community members being forced to leave their homes in the Altos de Chiapas.

On 16 November, the brothers asked the *Comisión Estatal de los Derechos Humanos (CEDH)*, the State Commission for Human Rights, to verify the whereabouts and well being of a member of the Colonia Los Angeles community called Salvador Díaz Díaz, who had been arrested on the same day, by *Policía Judicial del Estado (PJE)*, State Judicial Police. The next day, members of the PJE went to Manuel Gómez Hernández's home, in Colonia Los Angeles, asking to speak to him. When they did not find him there, they patrolled the streets looking for him, accompanied by the local *cacique*.

Fearing for his safety, Manuel and his family went into hiding on 18 November. (It is not known whether Juan is also in hiding). Other family members have reportedly been questioned by the PJE and asked about Manuel's whereabouts. The family home is also being kept under surveillance by people linked to the local *cacique*, who together with PJE officers continue to patrol the streets looking for Manuel. Members of the Colonia Los Angeles Community have also been threatened by individuals linked to the local *cacique*, who have added that it is their intention to kill the brothers.

CDHFBC has made a request to the *Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH)*, National Commission for Human Rights and the *Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado*, State Attorney's Office for the necessary measures to be taken in order to guarantee the safety of the two human rights defenders, their families as well as the inhabitants of the Colonia Los Angeles.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights defenders make a vital contribution to strengthening the rule of law, civil society and the development of institutions to protect human rights. However, in Mexico those who struggle to defend the rights of others have often been the first to come under attack, and to have their own rights violated and their safety threatened. On 19 October Human Rights Lawyer, Digna Ochoa, was assassinated and earlier this month human rights defenders in Mexico City and in other parts of the country received death threats. CDHFBC stated that in Chiapas thirty-nine cases of threats and harassment made against members of twelve different human rights organisations still remain unsolved. Members of the CDHFBC have also faced attacks and intimidation this year.

Caciques are powerful figures in many areas of Mexico, particularly in Chiapas. They frequently control the political and economic life of areas with either the tacit or direct support of the local authorities and state security forces, enabling them to act with impunity.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defenders Manuel Gómez Hernández, Juan Gómez Hernández, their families and other members of the Colonia Los Angeles community;
- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of Manuel Gómez Hernández, Juan Gómez Hernández, their families and other members of the Colonia Los Angeles community;
- calling for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against the brothers, their families and members of the Colonia Los Angeles community, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities of the right of human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties.

APPEALS TO:

[please note that the telephone codes for Mexico are changing. Some of the numbers below have not been updated and you will be able to omit the (61), however with other numbers you will have to include the (61).]

Mariano Herrán Salvatti

Procurador General de Justicia del Estado de Chiapas

Libramiento Norte s/n
Infonavit el Rosario
Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas
México

Telegram: Procurador, Chiapas, México

Fax: + 52 9(61) 616 57 24

Salutation: Dear Attorney General / Señor Procurador

Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia

Gobernador del Estado de Chiapas

Palacio de Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas
Av. Central y Primera Oriente
Colonia Centro, C.P. 29009
Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas
México

Telegram: Gobernador, Chiapas, México

Fax: + 52 9(61) 612 09 17

Salutation: Dear Governor / Señor Gobernador

Lic. Pedro Raúl López Hernández

Presidente de la Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos en el Estado de Chiapas

Boulevard Comitán 143
Col. Moctezuma
Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas
México

Fax: + 52 9(61) 602 56 09

Telegram: Presidente de CEDH, Chiapas, México

Salutation: Dear President / Señor Presidente

COPIES TO:

Centro de Derechos Humanos

"Fray Bartolome de las Casas"

Calle Cuauhtémoc 12,

Colonia Centro Histórico

San Cristóbal de las Casas, CP 29200,

Chiapas,

MEXICO

Fax: + 52 9(61) 67 8 35 51

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 3 January 2002.