

-URGENT ACTION

PROTECTION NEEDED FOR VILLAGERS IN MEXICO

Four men on trial for an attack on human rights lawyer Ricardo Lagunes Gasca, and other inhabitants of Ejido Jotolá, southern Mexico, in September, have been intimidating witnesses and have threatened to kill and rape villagers since they were released on bail on 11 November.

The men were arrested on 3 November for the attack on human rights lawyer **Ricardo Lagunes Gasca** and villagers of Ejido Jotolá, Chilón municipality, Chiapas state, including **Carmen Aguilar Gómez** who was shot in the leg. The men were charged with attempted murder, deprivation of liberty and causing injuries, but on 11 November a judge released them on bail arguing that their offences were not serious.

During the night of 11 November, the men arrived back in Ejido Jotolá, apparently drunk, and stood around outside the home of the mother of a man who provided a witness statement against them. Local women also reported that in the following days the men shouted at them saying that they would “kill [those sympathizing with the National Zapatista Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN)] one by one and will rape all the women”.

According to community members, the attackers are part of an illegal armed group known as the Organización para la Defensa de los Derechos Indígenas y Campesinos (Organisation for the Protection of Indigenous and Peasants' rights, OPDDIC), which is in opposition to EZLN sympathisers. On 7 November, members of OPDDIC threatened to set fire to homes in Ejido Jotolá in retaliation for the arrests of the four men.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to immediately provide protection for the inhabitants of Ejido Jotolá, Chilón municipality, as well as to human rights defenders working in the area, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling on them to ensure that adequate measures are taken to prevent the four men accused of the initial attack from threatening or attacking members of the community;
- calling for a prompt and impartial enquiry into the new threats against villagers and to investigate how the men awaiting trial were allowed to return to the community without any measures in place to prevent new acts of intimidation.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 DECEMBER 2009 TO:

Minister of the Interior
 Secretario de Gobernación
 Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez
 Del. Cuauhtémoc, México D.F.,
 C.P.06600, MEXICO

Fax: +52 55 5093 3414

Email: secretario@segob.gob.mx

Salutation: Señor Secretario/

Dear Minister

Attorney General of Chiapas
 Mtro. Raciél López Salazar
 Procurador General de Justicia del
 Estado de Chiapas
 Libramiento Norte no. 2010, Col. El
 Bosque, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, CP
 29049, MEXICO

Fax: +52 961 616 5724

Email: raciel.lopez@mje.chiapas.gob.mx

**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Señor
 Procurador**

Chiapas Human Rights Commission
 Presidente de la Comisión Estatal de
 Derechos Humanos de Chiapas
 Blvd. Comitán 143, Col. Moctezuma,
 Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, MEXICO
**Fax: +52 961 639 6615 (if someone
 answers, say “me da tono de fax, por
 favor”)**

Email: cdh@cdh-chiapas.org.mx

**Salutation: Señor Presidente/Dear
 President**

COPIES TO: Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, email: accionurgente@frayba.org.mx

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 250/09 (AMR 41/049/2009). Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR41/049/2009/en

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 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ricardo Lagunes Gasca, a lawyer with the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Centre, visited Ejido Jotolá on 18 September as he was advising relatives of two men who are being prosecuted on the basis of evidence extracted under torture (see UA 103/09, AMR 41/021/2009, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR41/049/2009/en> and follow-ups). As he was leaving the village, the group of OPDDIC members, some armed with rifles and others with sticks and rocks, grabbed hold of Ricardo Lagunes, then hit him and threatened to lynch him. The attempt on his life was stopped by other community members, but in the violence that followed, Carmen Aguilar Gómez was shot and injured.

Human rights defenders in Mexico face threats, attacks, politically motivated criminal charges and imprisonment for leading protests or promoting respect for human rights. The government has agreed to provide protection measures ordered by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to several human rights defenders, but some have reported that no effective protection has been provided. Substantial efforts have not been made to investigate cases of abuses against human rights defenders; impunity is the general rule in these cases, leaving open the possibility of further attacks.

Threats and attacks by groups opposed to the EZLN, such as OPDDIC, against members of communities perceived as EZLN supporters remain common in the areas of Chiapas where the EZLN influence is contested. The failure of the authorities to tackle these groups has left many communities in fear of further attacks.

The EZLN is an armed opposition group which has been militarily inactive for many years, but continues to operate as a social and political movement in many areas of Chiapas

Further information on UA: 250/09 Index: AMR 41/059/2009 Issue Date: 18 November 2009

