

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 41/70/96

UA 255/96

Fear for safety

5 November 1996

MEXICOMembers of CONPAZ, human rights organization

During the early hours of 4 November 1996 the offices of the non-governmental human rights organization, *Coordinación de Organismos No Gubernamentales por la Paz* (CONPAZ), Coordination of Non-Governmental Organizations for Peace, in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, were raided by unidentified individuals. After destroying office equipment, including computers, and goods, including medicines awaiting distribution to people in need, the attackers tried to set fire to the building.

The attack, the fourth and most serious carried against CONPAZ during the past two months, heightens concern for the safety of CONPAZ members in the face of governmental failure to bring the perpetrators to justice, despite complaints made to local authorities about the previous attacks.

Amnesty International believes CONPAZ has been targeted for its human rights advocacy in the state of Chiapas and its outspoken criticism about governmental inaction to stop human rights violation there. Some CONPAZ lawyers, such as Miguel Angel de los Santos, who received the 1995 Reebok Human Rights Award for his work, have been involved in presenting cases of serious human rights violations perpetrated in 1994 by the Mexican army in Chiapas before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Other Mexican human rights defenders participating in this presentation have recently suffered death threats (see update to UA 200/96, AMR 41/62/96), and members of CONPAZ believe that the latest attack may be linked to such incidents, although they themselves have not received any specific threats.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CONPAZ is among scores of human rights organizations in Mexico which have suffered threats and attacks, mostly carried out by unidentified individuals, who appear to act with the authorities complacency. Despite scores of complaints presented to the Mexican authorities over the last 12 months about this growing pattern, nobody has been brought to justice. International solidarity with Mexican human rights defenders has been acknowledged to be an effective way to ensure a degree of protection to those under threat. Amnesty International nevertheless believes the Mexican authorities should act immediately and effectively to stop this alarming and worsening pattern.

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

- expressing grave concern about the attack perpetrated against the *Coordinación de Organismos No Gubernamentales por la Paz* (CONPAZ) in San Cristóbal de las Casas on 4 November 1996, noting that the authorities failed to prevent it despite it being the fourth attack in two months;
- calling for immediate and effective measures to prevent further violence against members and property of CONPAZ, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- requesting to be kept informed about measures adopted to prevent future attacks, and about the investigations carried out.

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

COPIES TO:

Sres. CONPAZ
Apartado Postal 41
San Cristóbal de las Casas
29200 chiapas
MEXICO
fax: +52 967 83868

and to diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country.

NOTE: Like a number of governments, the Mexican authorities employ a large human rights bureaucracy, one task of which is to respond to public appeals, such as those generated by UAs. Those taking part in this UA should expect such a reply. In AI's experience, the Mexican authorities currently take little effective action beyond the paperwork to fully deal with AI's concerns, particularly impunity. However, given their sensitivity to international public opinion, UAs continue to be invaluable in confronting human rights emergencies in Mexico. Please forward replies to your Section or to the IS, where they will be monitored and acted upon. See also "Mexican Wave" (*UA NEWS*, ACT 60/01/96, March 1996).

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your Section Office, if sending appeals after 19 December 1996.