

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 41/117/97

UA 409/97 Extrajudicial executions / Fear for safety 23 December 1997

MEXICO45 displaced Indian peasants, including 15 children, reported killed in Chiapas massacre

In an attack on 22 December 1997 lasting several hours, 45 displaced Tzotziles Indian peasants living in Acteal in the municipality of Chenalhó, in Chiapas State, are reported to have been killed by paramilitary groups associated with the local and state authorities.

Twenty-one women, 15 children, including a new-born baby, and nine men were killed during the attack in Acteal which was reportedly carried out by at least 60 heavily armed members of paramilitary groups, including the groups *Paz y Justicia*, Peace and Justice, and *Máscara Roja*, Red Mask. At least 25 others were wounded in the attack, 11 very seriously. They are being treated in local hospitals.

The victims come from among hundreds of internally displaced Indian peasants from the surrounding communities of northern Chiapas who have settled in Acteal after being increasingly targeted for threats and human rights violations for their alleged sympathy for the armed opposition group *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)*, Zapatista National Liberation Army. People who do not support the government are often labelled as EZLN supporters by paramilitary groups and become vulnerable to human rights violations.

The attack on 22 December began at around midday and continued into the night, despite the presence of state police units nearby which did not intervene to stop the attack. The closest unit of the *Seguridad Publica*, security police, is said to be less than 200 metres from the community. The attack is reported to have followed several days of threats against the community of Acteal, which were denounced to the state authorities by local non-governmental organizations. However, the authorities failed to act.

There are serious fears that further attacks may take place against surviving residents and witnesses unless the Mexican authorities take urgent preventive action.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the worsening human rights situation in the state of Chiapas as a result of growing harassment, threats and attacks directed against peasant communities by paramilitary groups, in particular *Paz y Justicia* and *Máscara Roja*, acting on behalf of local chiefs linked to the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)*, Institutional Revolutionary Party, the ruling party. Alarmingly, such activities are carried out with the acquiescence and tacit support, including funding, of the authorities, whereby most of those responsible remain unpunished. On 4 November 1997, Samuel Ruiz, bishop of the diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas State, well-respected for his efforts to bring peace to the area, escaped unhurt after the convoy in which he and other members of the clergy were travelling was ambushed, reportedly by members of *Paz y Justicia* near the community of Tila, Chiapas State (see UA 351/97, AMR 41/103/97, 6 November 1997). To Amnesty International's knowledge there have been no attempts by the authorities to bring those responsible to justice.

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

- expressing the deepest concern at the killing of 45 people in the community of Acteal, including 15 children, by paramilitary groups;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into the massacre and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for immediate measures to guarantee the safety of surviving community members and witnesses;
- seeking assurances that all injured are receiving appropriate medical care;
- expressing alarm at the increasing reports of serious human rights violations in Chiapas State, reportedly by members of paramilitary groups particularly *Paz y Justicia* and *Máscara Roja*, and the lack of effort to bring them to account for their acts.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Lic. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León

Presidente de la República

Palacio Nacional, 06067 México D.F., MEXICO

Telegrams: Presidente Zedillo, México D.F., México

Faxes: (+ 52 5) 515 1794 / 542 1648 (voice line: ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

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:

Human Rights Organizations

Comisión de Derechos Humanos "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas"

Apartado postal 178

San Cristóbal de las Casas

29250 Chiapas

MEXICO

Centro de Derechos Humanos

"Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez" A.C.

Puebla No. 153

Col. Roma, 06700

México D.F. MEXICO

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 15 February 1998.