

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 41/02/98

13 January 1998

Further information on UA 351/97 (AMR 41/103/97, 6 November 1997) and follow-up (AMR 41/106/97, 10 November 1997) - Fear for safety

MEXICO **Father Samuel Ruíz, Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas**
Raúl Vera, auxiliary bishop
All human rights defenders working on Chiapas

Amnesty International remains concerned for the safety of Father Samuel Ruíz, Bishop of the diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas State, and member of the *Comisión Nacional de Intermediación* (CONAI), National Intermediation Commission, and Raúl Vera, auxiliary bishop in the same diocese.

Its concern has been renewed following unfounded accusations made by a senior member of the Mexican armed forces, that Bishop Ruíz is involved with the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), Zapatista National Liberation Army, an armed opposition group operating in Chiapas State. Bishop Vera recently alleged in public that ex-members of both the armed and police forces have been responsible for the training of paramilitary groups, who reportedly carried out the massacre of 45 Tzotzil Indians in Acteal, municipality of Chenalhó, Chiapas State, on 22 December 1997 (see UA 409/97, AMR 41/117/97, 23 December and follow-up AMR 41/01/97, 2 January 1998).

Over the past four years, since the EZLN first appeared publicly in January 1994, Bishops Ruíz and Vera have suffered human rights violations, including an armed paramilitary attack while they were travelling in a convoy in the north of Chiapas during November 1997 (see UA 351/97, AMR/103/97, 6 November 1997 and follow-up AMR 41/106/97, 10 November 1997). Such attacks have occurred in response to their impartial role in seeking a peaceful solution to appalling human rights situation in the region.

Over the past two years, Amnesty International has documented an escalation in the level of violence in Chiapas. This has accompanied an increase in paramilitary activity including by *Paz y Justicia*, Peace and Justice, and *Máscara Roja*, Red Mask, two paramilitary groups operating in northern Chiapas, as well as the intensified militarization of the region. Since the December 1997 massacre in Acteal, members of the armed forces have been conducting arbitrary searches in northern Chiapas and also entering areas controlled by the EZLN, in violation of agreements made in previous negotiations between the government and the EZLN. Furthermore, the organisation is alarmed that little effort has been made to curtail the activities of paramilitary groups, and media reports suggest that further paramilitary attacks are planned. As a result, Amnesty International fears that human rights defenders in the region may be at serious risk of human rights violations, including extrajudicial execution, torture and 'disappearance', should they continue their work on behalf of indigenous communities in the region.

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

- seeking assurances that measures will be taken to guarantee the safety of Bishop Ruíz, Bishop Vera and all human rights defenders in Chiapas state;
- calling for an independent and impartial commission to be set up to address the mushrooming of paramilitary groups in Mexico, and the political, policy and practical response to them by state and federal authorities;

- urging for efforts to be made to disband all paramilitary groups operating in Chiapas;
- expressing deep alarm at the escalating level of violence and increasing militarization in the region.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of Interior

Lic. Francisco Labastida Ochoa
Secretario de Gobernación
Secretaría de Gobernación
Bucarelli 99, 1er piso,
Col Juarez, 06699 México DF, MEXICO

Telegrams: Secretario de Gobernación, México DF, México

Faxes: + 52 5 546 5350

Salutation: Sr. Secretario / Dear Minister

2) Governor of the State of Chiapas

Lic. Roberto Albores Guillén
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

3) Attorney General of the Republic

Lic. Jorge Madrazo Cuéllar
Procurador General de la República
Procuraduría General de la República
Paseo de la Reforma y Violeta
Col. Guerrero, 06300 México D.F., MEXICO

Telegrams: Procurador General, Mexico, Mexico

Faxes: + 52 5 626 4419

Salutation: Sr. Procurador General / Dear Attorney General

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 24 February 1998.