



Public

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To: Health professional members  
From: Medical team / Americas program  
Date: 19 September 2003

## MEDICAL ACTION

### Ill-health of Francisco Cortés, peasant leader BOLIVIA

**Key words** ill-health / access to healthcare

#### Amnesty International's concerns

Amnesty International is concerned about the poor health of Francisco Cortés, a peasant leader of Colombian nationality, currently being held at the maximum security prison *Penitenciaría de San Pedro de Chochocoro* on the outskirts of La Paz. Public statements made by Francisco Cortés' lawyer indicate that he is suffering from hepatitis, headaches, serious sight problems and constant nosebleeds. Amnesty International is seeking further information about his condition.

There is no information indicating that he has received adequate medical attention for his health problems but Amnesty International has had long-standing concerns about the serious inadequacy of health care in Bolivian prisons (see *Bolivia: Torture and Ill-Treatment: Amnesty International's Concerns*, AMR 18/008/2001; <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR180082001>). Amnesty International is calling for a proper medical investigation and diagnosis of the health problems of Francisco Cortés, and for him to be given appropriate treatment.

#### Background information

Francisco Cortés was arrested on 10 April 2003 on charges of terrorism, drug-trafficking and espionage. The Bolivian government has accused him of being a member of the Colombian armed opposition group ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* – National Liberation Army) and of trying to establish such a group in Bolivia.

Francisco Cortés is a peasant leader and executive member of the non-governmental organization National Association of Peasant Land Users (*Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* - ANUC) in Colombia. He has been included in the Colombian Interior Ministry's Witness Protection Program for Threatened Persons since 1999 following the receipt of death

threats due to his legitimate work as a peasant leader. He and his family have been forced to continually move residence for their personal safety.

Francisco Cortés had been invited to La Paz by members of the Bolivian coca-growing peasant movement as part of initiatives for exchanging experiences between peasant organizations in the Andean region. He was arrested along with three Bolivian nationals, who are also still currently detained. They are Claudio Ramírez, a Bolivian peasant leader and owner of the house where Francisco Cortés was arrested; his daughter Nelly Ramírez, a radio announcer; and Carmelo Peñaranda, coca leaf farmer and union leader.

### **Right to health**

The Bolivian Constitution and international human rights law guarantee the right to health and to life. Article 7(a) of Bolivia's Constitution guarantees the right to health and safety and to life. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guarantees the right to health (at article 12) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states in article 6 that "every human being has the inherent right to life".

In addition, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, in discussing provision of health care, state in article 22 (2) that: "Sick prisoners who require specialist medical treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals".

### **Recommendations**

Please write letters, preferably in Spanish, or in English to the authorities below, using professionally-headed paper if you use this in your profession:

- introducing yourself in your professional capacity and/or as a member of Amnesty International concerned with human rights and health;
- expressing concern at reports that Francisco Cortés, held in a maximum security prison in La Paz, is suffering from hepatitis, headaches, serious sight problems and constant nosebleeds;
- urging the authorities to ensure that he is provided with a proper diagnosis of his medical problems and given appropriate medical care;
- urging the authorities to immediately provide information on the state of health of, and medical assistance provided to, Francisco Cortés.

### **Addresses**

#### **President**

Sr. Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada  
Palacio de Gobierno  
Plaza Murillo s/n  
La Paz, Bolivia  
Fax: + 591 22 2 04 213  
*Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente de la República*

#### **Minister of the Presidency, Justice and Human Rights**

Sr. José Guillermo Justiniano  
Ministerio de la Presidencia, Justicia y Derechos Humanos  
Palacio de Gobierno  
Plaza Murillo s/n  
La Paz, Bolivia  
Fax: + 591 22 203588  
*Salutation: Sr Ministro de la Presidencia, de Justicia y Derechos Humanos*

#### **Minister of Health**

Sr. Javier Torres Goitia

Ministerio de Salud  
Plaza del Estudiante esq. Cañada Strongest  
La Paz, Bolivia  
Fax: + 591 22 391 590/081167812  
*Salutation: Sr. Ministro de Previsión Social y Salud Pública*

**Director General of Prisons**

Sr. Director General  
Jorge Daniel Ayllón Zamorano  
Ministerio de Gobierno  
Dirección General de  
Régimen Penitenciario  
Av. Arce esq. Belisario Salinas  
La Paz, Bolivia  
*Salutation: Director General de Régimen Penitenciario*

**Copies of appeals**

Please send copies of your appeals to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Bolivia:

Sr. Carlos Saavedra Bruno  
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto  
Plaza Murillo  
c Ingavi esq. Junín  
La Paz, Bolivia .  
fax + 591 22 4 08 405 or replace last three digits with 642 or 905 or 934  
*Salutation: Sr. Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto*

and to diplomatic representatives of Bolivia accredited to your country.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within six weeks of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response, referring to your previous letter(s). Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 2003, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

**Monitoring of actions**

If you have access to e-mail you can help our attempt to monitor letter writing actions. If you write one, two or more letters please send us an e-mail and let us know. Please write in the subject line of your e-mail the index number of the action and the number of letters your write e.g. AMR 18/008/2003 – 2. Please also let us know about any other activity undertaken by your group/network and e-mail us at [medical@amnesty.org](mailto:medical@amnesty.org) Thank you