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UA 27/01 Fear for safety / Arbitrary detention / Legal concern
31 January 2001

ECUADOR Antonio Vargas, indigenous leader
Luis Villacís, trade union and community leader

Two leading Ecuadoran activists have been detained seemingly for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

Antonio Vargas, President of the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas*, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities, and Luis Villacís Maldonado, President of the *Frente Popular*, Popular Front, a coalition of trade unions and grassroots organizations, were reportedly arrested on the morning of 30 January in the capital, Quito. They were detained without an arrest warrant and are currently held at the *Centro de Detención Provisional*, Provisional Detention Centre, in Quito.

It is believed that their arrest is connected to the legitimate part they have played in organising demonstrations and protests against the government's economic policy. The groups they represent are reportedly preparing to stage mass demonstrations on 7 February under the slogan *Acción Nacional contra el Hambre y la Corrupción*, National Action against Hunger and Corruption.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has been concerned about torture and ill-treatment in Ecuador throughout the past decades. In 2000, methods of torture and ill-treatment used by the police reportedly included beating detainees, kicking people in the face, stamping on their feet, burning them and applying electric shocks to genitals, tongues and chests.

During the past weeks, trade unions, indigenous groups and grassroots organizations have staged a number of demonstrations in protest at "dollarisation" of the Ecuadoran economy that have followed from the newly appointed President, Gustavo Noboa's, economic policy. President Noboa came to power when the previous President, Jamil Mahuad, was forced to resign on 21 January 2000 following mass demonstrations against the government's proposal to make the US dollar the official currency. Nevertheless, President Noboa has continued the previous government's economic policy, making the US dollar the official currency and implementing an extensive programme of privatization of state-owned enterprises.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Antonio Vargas and Luis Villacís Maldonado, who have allegedly been detained solely for exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression and association;
- urging that they be released immediately, if they are not charged with a recognisably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

President

Dr. Gustavo Noboa Bejarano
Presidente de la República del Ecuador
Palacio de Carondelet
García Moreno 1043
Quito
ECUADOR
Fax: + 5932 580735
Salutation: Dear President / Sr. Presidente

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Juan Manrique Martínez
Ministro de Gobierno y Policía
Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía
Benalcázar y Espejo
Quito
ECUADOR
Fax: + 5932 580067
Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organization

Comisión Ecuémica de Derechos Humanos
Calle Carlos Ibarra 176 y 10 de Agosto
Edif. Yuraj Pirca, noveno piso
Quito
ECUADOR

and to diplomatic representatives of Ecuador accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 March 2001.