

UA 277/98 Fear for safety

28 October 1998

GUATEMALA Ramiro Choc, peasant activist and member of *Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina* (CONIC), National Indigenous and Peasant Coordination, other CONIC members, and inhabitants of Livingston municipality, Izabal department

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the peasant population of Livingston municipality in light of recent armed attacks and threats made against them. There are fears that similar incidents could occur in the area in the near future.

On 18 October 1998, Ramiro Choc, a member of *Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina*, CONIC, National Indigenous and Peasant Coordination, was shot in the arm by the owner of El Torno de la Virgen estate in the municipality of Livingston. The landowner first threatened Ramiro Choc, saying: "*que ya lo conoce y que lo perseguirá hasta desaparecerlo porque la organización de campesinos que está promoviendo estorba en las fincas*" (Now I know who you are, I'll be after you until I make you "disappear" because the peasant's organization that you are promoting is stirring up problems on my lands).

On 24 October, several armed men chased and shot at 14 members of the El Cedro community. They said denouncing the attack would be useless as the landowners were united and would do what they please. One of the armed men allegedly acknowledged that a military colonel, the relative of one of the landowners, had provided them with the arms.

Amnesty International believes that the attack on Ramiro Choc was related to his legitimate activities as a human rights and land activist, and that the landowner and his supporters acted with the complicity or acquiescence of the local authorities.

While Amnesty International takes no position on competing claims for land ownership, or on questions relating to judicial decisions on land tenure, Amnesty International believes the continuing campaign of harassment against peasants living in the municipality of Livingston to be a deliberate attempt to intimidate them into leaving the land and giving up their legitimate right to argue their case of having claim to the land.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Land activists campaigning to retain lands also claimed by business interests, local officials or large landowners, are frequently the victims of death threats and harassment. Such reports suggest a alarming pattern of intimidation against land activists in Livingston municipality and other municipalities, such as El Estor, also in the department of Izabal (see UA 02/98, AMR 34/01/98, 6 January 1998 and UA 32/97, AMR 34/01/97, 30 January 1997).

The Socio-Economic Aspects and Agrarian Situation Accord, signed in May 1996 between the government and the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG), Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, states that rural areas require an integral strategy that facilitate access to land, offers juridical security and promotes conflict resolution, and calls for the creation of a commission to resolve land disputes. Yet Amnesty International continues to receive an alarming number of reports of death threats and harassment against peasants activists defending their right to claim their land.

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

- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of Ramiro Choc, other CONIC members and inhabitants of the municipality of Livingston, department of Izabal;
- appealing for an inquiry into the attack of Ramiro Choc on 18 October 1998 and that on 14 members of El Cedro community on 24 October;
- urging the authorities to effectively implement the pledges made in the Socio-Economic Aspects and Agrarian Situation Accord of May 1996;
- reminding the government of Guatemala of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 17 (2): "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property".

APPEALS TO: (If voice answers when sending a fax, please say: Me puede dar tono de fax por favor.)

President of the Republic of Guatemala S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala, Palacio Nacional, 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida,
 Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Presidente, Guatemala, Guatemala
E-mails: alvaroarzu@guateconnect.com / alvaroarzu@guate.net
Faxes + 502 221 4537
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President

Minister of Interior Lic. Rodolfo Mendoza Rosales, Ministro de Gobernación
 Ministerio de Gobernación, Despacho Ministerial, Of. N° 8, Palacio Nacional,
 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala
Faxes: + 502 361 5604/361 5613
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

Minister of Agriculture Livestock & Nutrition Sr. Mariano Ventura
 Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Nutrición, Palacio Nacional
 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Faxes: +502 332 3164

Governor of the Department of Izabal Gobernador Departmental de Izabal
 7 Calle y 1 Avenida, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala

Telegrams: Gobernador, Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala
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Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

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and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 December 1998.

"No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property."
Article 17 (2), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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