

UA 166/00

Fear for**HONDURASSalvador Zúñiga] indigenous human rights defenders
Berta Cáceres (f)]**

Two indigenous human rights defenders have been harassed and intimidated. They believe the police are implicated, and Amnesty International is concerned that they are in danger.

Salvador Zúñiga and Berta Cáceres work with the *Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas* (COPIN), Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations. Honduran human rights defenders believe the couple are being intimidated because COPIN is campaigning against the El Tigre dam, which will displace indigenous people and flood their ancestral lands.

On 31 May, an armed man was seen standing outside the couple's house, in the town of La Esperanza, Intibucá department. He ran away when their children raised the alarm. Several cars were stationed outside over the next few days, apparently watching the house. COPIN members believe that local police are involved, working on behalf of landowners.

The couple's house was apparently broken into twice shortly before this surveillance began. The first time, on 26 May, the housekeeper was beaten. On 30 May, the house was searched but nothing was stolen.

The indigenous Lenca people may be displaced when the El Tigre dam is completed. The dam will affect the departments of Intibucá and Lempira, near the border with El Salvador. Indigenous people are also concerned that the dam will leave their ancestral lands under water.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Honduran human rights defenders face serious danger. On 26 April 2000, Julio César Pineda, an outspoken critic of human rights violations committed by police agents was almost killed when he was shot in the head at close range. Several indigenous leaders have also been killed in the last few years. The authorities have so far taken few, if any, steps to investigate these crimes, bring those responsible to justice and ensure human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear.

The right to defend human rights has been recognised in international declarations and resolutions. The United Nations General Assembly has adopted a declaration intended to ensure that states work to protect human rights defenders and guarantee them the freedom to carry out their legitimate activities (*Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, adopted on 9 December 1998). The Organization of American States have undertaken to implement this declaration, in a resolution adopted by their General Assembly in June 1999, and agreed to provide "Human Rights Defenders with the necessary guarantees and facilities to continue freely carrying out their work" as well as to adopt "the necessary steps to guarantee their life, liberty, and integrity".

In April 2000, the UN Human Rights Commission requested that the United Nations Secretary General appoint a special representative on human rights defenders.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Salvador Zúñiga and Berta Cáceres, members of COPIN who have been intimidated because of their legitimate human rights activities, and urging that immediate measures be taken to ensure their safety and freedom to defend human rights;
- calling for a prompt and impartial investigation into the reported intimidation, including reports implicating local police agents, and asking to be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and when those responsible are brought to justice;
- urging the Honduran authorities to adhere to the principles of the United Nations *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, adopted on 9 December 1998, and to implement the Organization of American States Human Rights Defenders Resolution adopted on 7 June 1999 [AG/RES. 1671 (XXIX/99)].

APPEALS TO:

President

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Salutation: Sr. Presidente/Dear President

Minister of Defence and Public Security

Elizabeth Chiuz Sierra
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Attorney General

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 Fiscal General de la República
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COPIES TO:

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and to diplomatic representatives of Honduras accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 August 2000.