

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 25/94 Fear of "disappearance" / Torture / Fear for 26 January 1994
safety

MEXICO Severiano SANTIZ GÓMEZ, 65
Sebastián SANTIZ LÓPEZ, 65
Hermelindo SANTIZ GÓMEZ, 40

and other members of the Tzeltal indigenous community of Morelia, state of Chiapas

Amnesty International has learnt of the reported detention and subsequent "disappearance" of the three above-named members of the Tzeltal indigenous community of Morelia, state of Chiapas, by members of the armed forces.

Witnesses interviewed by an Amnesty International delegation which visited Chiapas between 18 and 21 January 1994, claimed that Severiano Santiz, Sebastián Santiz and Hermelindo Santiz were detained along with 31 others on 7 January after the army raided the Tzeltal indigenous community of Morelia, Altamirano municipality, state of Chiapas. The three were reportedly tortured inside the local church and taken away in a military ambulance. They have not been seen since. The authorities have denied holding them and Amnesty International fears for their safety.

Amnesty International delegates were told that the 31 others detained in Morelia allegedly suffered beatings, kicking and burns during the first three days of their detention, during which they had all been placed under the authority of the Attorney General's Office (*Procuraduría General de la República*). Some have been released although the exact figure is not known. The others remain in Cerro Hueco prison in Tuxtla Gutierrez.

Eleven other members of the Tzeltal community told Amnesty International delegates that they feared for their lives after recently receiving death threats from the local authorities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 1 January 1994, a previously unknown armed opposition group called the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)*, Zapatista National Liberation Army, took control of several towns in the state of Chiapas. By the end of the week, the EZLN, most of whose members seem to belong to local Tzotzil Indian communities, had retreated towards dense and mostly uninhabited jungle areas although heavy fighting between the armed forces and the rebels continued to be reported. On 5 and 6 January Indigenous communities outside the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas were bombed from the air. On 12 January the government declared a ceasefire, although there were reports of continuing land attacks by the armed forces during the following days. Early reports indicated a number of human rights abuses, such as the extrajudicial execution

of at least five rebels and the torture of rebel and civilian detainees at the hands of the security forces.

Chiapas has long been the scene of human rights abuses by the security forces in the context of land disputes and allegations of electoral fraud. These violations have included mass and arbitrary arrests, torture, ill-treatment and political killings. A large number of the victims of such abuses belong to the poorest sectors of the population, some of them indigenous. Very rarely have those responsible been brought to justice.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the three Tzeltal community members, Severiano Santiz Gómez, Santiago Santiz López and Hermelindo Santiz Gómez, who have not been seen since 7 January 1994, when they were reportedly detained in Morelia, state of Chiapas by members of the armed forces;
- urging that there be an immediate and thorough investigation into their whereabouts and into the allegations that they and others were tortured by the armed forces in Morelia;
- urging that if Severiano Santiz, Sebastián Santiz and Hermelindo Santiz are in detention, that they be humanely treated and allowed access to lawyers, relatives and human rights monitors;
- urging that if they are in detention, that they be charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released immediately;
- expressing concern that other members of the Tzeltal community of Morelia have reported receiving death threats, and urging the authorities to take measures to ensure their protection, and to bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic

Lic. Carlos Salinas de Gortari
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio Nacional
 06067 México D.F., Mexico

Telegrams: Presidente Salinas, México D.F., Mexico

Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme

Faxes: +52 5 271 1764

Salutation: Sr. Presidente/Dear President

2) Minister of Defense

Gral. Antonio Riviello Bazán
 Ministro de Defensa Nacional
 Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
 Ávila Camacho e Industria Militar
 Lomas de Sotelo
 11640 México DF, Mexico

Telegramas: Ministro Defensa, Mexico DF, Mexico

Faxes: +52 5 557 7904

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

1) National Human Rights Commission

Sres.
 Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos

Periférico Sur 3469
Col San Jerónimo Lídice
10200 México DF, Mexico

2) Non-governmental Human Rights Group

Sres.

CONPAZ - Coordinación de los ONGs
de San Cristóbal de las Casas por la Paz
Avda. 5 de Mayo No. 21
Barrio La Merced
San Cristóbal de las Casas
Chiapas, Mexico

3) daily newspaper

Sr. Editor

El Financiero

Lago Bolsena 176, Col Anahuac
México DF, 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 9 March 1994.