

UA 14/97 Torture / Fear of torture / Prisoners of conscience 15 January 1997

MEXICO **Laurencio Guarneros Sandoval, aged 40, community activist**
 Julio Bello Palacios, aged 16, community activist
 Remigio Ayala Martínez, aged 18, community activist
 Carlos Ricardo Ruiz Canada, aged 45, restaurant manager

The four people named above were arrested on 11 January 1997 by members of the judicial police of Yautepec, at Yautepec, Tepoztlan, Morelos state. During the following two hours at least two of them are alleged to have been tortured - 16-year-old Julio Bello Palacios was taken to a cliff at gunpoint and threatened with death, and Laurencio Guarneros Sandoval was forced to sign a confession of unknown content.

The four were then transferred to prison in Cuernavaca, Morelos state, where they remain. The family of Laurencio Guarneros Sandoval have visited him in prison and have confirmed signs of torture. Amnesty International fears that the four remain at risk of further torture and ill-treatment.

Laurencio Guarneros Sandoval, Julio Bello Palacios and Remigio Ayala Martínez are members of the *Comité de Unidad Tepozteca* (CUT), Committee of Tepoztecan Unity, an indigenous peasant organization, and of the volunteer security group for the Tepoztlan town hall. They have been very active in protecting and promoting the rights of Tepoztlan people. Amnesty International believes they have been imprisoned solely on the grounds of their lawful activities and considers them to be prisoners of conscience.

Suspensions of an official cover-up of the torture have been raised by the fact that the arrival of the four in prison was registered as having occurred two hours earlier. These were the two hours during which the detainees were allegedly being tortured elsewhere.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The state of Morelos has long been the scene of human rights violations allegedly carried out by the security forces, mainly in the context of land disputes. Indigenous people and peasants are most often the victims of this violence. The frequent association of powerful landowners (*caciques*) with local authorities seriously undermines the legal rights of the peasants and places them at a higher risk of human rights violations. (See *Human Rights Violations in Mexico: A Challenge for the Nineties*, p. 5, AI Index AMR 41/21/95).

A development company, in association with the governor of Morelos, Jorge Carrillo Olea, has been attempting to build a multi-million dollar golf course and houses on common land, land which is regarded by the inhabitants of Tepoztlan as sacred. For months, local people, including women, children and elderly, some of them members of the CUT, have organized numerous peaceful actions in their struggle to stop the development.

On 10 April 1996, following one of those peaceful demonstrations, Marcos Olmedo Gutiérrez was extrajudicially killed by members of the security forces. More than a hundred arrest warrants were issued against members of CUT and some arrests took place. Moreover, community activists, including minors, were repeatedly subjected to threats and ill-treatment. One of those previously arrested, Gerardo Demesa Padilla, a teacher, remains in prison as a prisoner

of conscience. For further information see UA 102/96, AMR 41/18/96, 16 April 1996, and follow-ups, AMR 41/33/96, 5 July, and AMR 41/52/96, 4 September.

Amnesty International delegations visited Tepoztlan in June and December 1996 and were able to interview some of the human rights defenders, community activists and members of CUT who had been ill-treated, threatened and imprisoned. The delegation confirmed the reports of violent repression against those active in promoting and protecting human rights. For further information, see chapter on Mexico in Human Rights Defenders on the Front Line (AMR 02/01/96).

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

- expressing deep concern at the alleged torture of Laurencio Guarneros Sandoval and Julio Bello Palacios;
- calling for the unconditional and immediate release of all four detainees as prisoners of conscience;
- urging the government to take immediate measures to guarantee their safety while they remain in custody;
- calling for a prompt and thorough investigation into the alleged torture and for those members of the security forces responsible to be brought to justice;
- asking to be kept informed of the outcome of any investigation.

APPEALS TO:

1) President of the Republic

Lic. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio Nacional, 06067 México D.F., MEXICO

Telegrams: Presidente Zedillo, México D.F., México

Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme

Faxes: + 52 5 515 1794 or 542 1648 (voice line: ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

2) Attorney General of the Republic

Lic. Jorge Madrazo Cuellar
 Procuraduría General de la República
 Paseo de la Reforma y Violeta
 Col. Guerrero
 06300 México D.F., MEXICO

Telegrams: Sr. Procurador de la República, México D.F.

Fax: (+52 5) 626 4419/4430

Salutation: Sr. Procurador de la República/Dear Attorney

3) Minister of the Interior

Lic. Emilio Chuayffet Chemor
 Secretario de la Gobernación
 Secretaría de la Gobernación
 Bucareli 99, 1er piso
 Col. Juárez, 06699 México DF, MEXICO

Telegrams: Secretario Gobernación, México D.F., México

Faxes: + 52 5 546 5350

Salutation: Sr. Secretario / Dear Minister

4) Governor of the State of Morelos

Governor of the state of Morelos
Lic. Jorge Carrillo Olea
Gobernador del Estado de Morelos
Palacio de Gobierno Cuernavaca
Estado de Morelos, MEXICO

Telegrams: Gobernador Morelos, Mexico
Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

1) Daily newspaper

Sr. Editor
La Jornada
Balderas 68
06050 México D.F., MEXICO

2) Human rights organization

Sres., Centro de Derechos Humanos
Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez, AC
CP 06700, Mexico D.F., Mexico, MEXICO

E-mail: prodh@laneta.apc.org

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 5 March 1997.