

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

**AI Index: AMR 41/04/94  
Distr: UA/SC**

**UA 70/94      Harassment of human rights activists**

**22 February 1994**

**MEXICO:      Church human rights activists and medical personnel**

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Amnesty International is concerned at reports of the harassment of Church human rights monitors and medical personnel in the state of Chiapas.

On 20 February 1994, workers of the San Carlos Hospital of Altamirano, state of Chiapas, were verbally and physically harassed by a mob, allegedly instigated by local landowners and municipal authorities. It seems that the reason for this harassment was the hospital workers' non-partisan involvement in the treatment of people injured during the armed conflict in Chiapas which began on 1 January. The San Carlos Hospital is run by the religious *Compañía de las Hijas de la Caridad de San Vicente de Paul*, Order of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, and has provided medical assistance to the wounded in this region of Chiapas since the conflict began on 1 January 1994. Some of the wounded have allegedly been linked to the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)*, Zapatista National Liberation Army.

Amnesty International is also concerned about reports of continuing threats and harassment by army personnel against members of the Church and other human rights activists working among the indigenous populations of Chiapas. Amnesty International continues to fear for the physical safety of human rights monitors working in the area.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

On 1 January 1994, the EZLN, an armed opposition group, took control of several towns in the state of Chiapas. Heavy fighting ensued for several days. On 12 January the government declared a ceasefire, although there were reports of continuing land attacks by the armed forces during the following days. An Amnesty International delegation visiting the area in late January, confirmed earlier reports of a number of human rights abuses, such as the extrajudicial executions 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 continuing human rights violations by the security forces in the context of land disputes and allegations of electoral fraud. These violations have included massive 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. Very rarely have those responsible been brought to justice.

Members of the Church and grassroots organizations have been active in promoting and protecting the rights of the indigenous populations of Chiapas for many decades, frequently encountering opposition from the local authorities and large landowners. For example, Bishop Samuel Ruiz, director of a local human rights group in San Cristóbal de las Casas, state of Chiapas, received a number of death threats in 1993 which it is believed were motivated by his work on behalf of indigenous populations in Southern Mexico.

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

- expressing concern about the harassment suffered by medical personnel and

human rights monitors in Chiapas in the context of the armed conflict which began on 1 January 1994 and urging immediate measures to guarantee their physical integrity;

- urging an prompt and thorough investigation into this harassment and that those found responsible be brought 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  
 Secretario de Defensa Nacional  
 Secretaría 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 Organization

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) Weekly magazine

Sr. Editor  
 Proceso  
 Fresas 13  
 Colonia del Valle  
 03100 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 5 April 1994.