

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/ Threats

21 January 2004

MEXICO

**Martín Barrios Hernández (m), human rights defender  
Other members of the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos y Laborales del Valle de Tehuacán*, Human and Labour Rights Commission of the Tehuacán Valley**

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There are concerns for the safety of Martín Barrios Hernández after he was seriously assaulted outside his home on 30 December 2003. The attack was the culmination of several verbal threats against him directly linked to his work as coordinator of the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos y Laborales del Valle de Tehuacán*, Human and Labour Rights Commission of the Tehuacán Valley, in Puebla State.

The attack took place at 9.30am as Martín Barrios was about to enter his home. An individual approached him and reportedly said, "*Fernando, stop f\*\*\*\*\* around*" ("*Fernando, ya deja de estar chingando*"). Martín Barrios turned round and was immediately hit on the head and back with a brick. As he tried to defend himself, his assailant punched him in the face and arms then kicked him in the stomach before fleeing from the scene in a taxi that had been waiting on the other side of the road. With his head bleeding profusely, Martín Barrios was transferred to the Red Cross centre for immediate medical attention. Later that day, a complaint was presented to the *Ministerio Público*, (Public Ministry Office) in Tehuacán.

The complaint indicates that the attack followed a number of threats Martín Barrios had received as a result of the Commission's work defending 25 people who had been fired by *maquilas* (assembly plants) in Ajalpan and in Tehuacán. After the Commission took up their cases, other factory workers reportedly warned him it would be better if he stopped, as someone from Ajalpan wanted to hurt him and that if he carried on, he would have to face the consequences.

Over the past year, the Human and Labour Rights Commission has been supporting about 300 workers who were fired from several factories which produce blue jeans, as well as from other smaller *maquilas* in Tehuacán. The factories producing jeans are owned by the Tarrant Apparel Group which is based in Los Angeles, in the United States. Through the Commission's efforts and increasing public support for their campaign, the workers received severance payments approaching the level required under Mexican Federal Labour Law.

In January 2003, the Commission and the Canadian-based organization Maquila Solidarity Network produced a joint report "*Tehuacán: del calzón de manta a los blue jeans*" / *Blue Jeans, Blue Waters and Workers Rights*" exposing the situation facing workers, who are primarily indigenous women, employed in the various blue jean production plants in the Tehuacán Valley. The report described problems faced by the workers, including poor salaries, long working hours, restrictions on forming trades unions, child labour and health risks posed by chemicals used in the laundries as well as environmental issues arising from the *maquilas*. Local factory owners were reportedly upset by the increased international attention on the industry.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:**

- expressing serious concern at the attack on Martín Barrios Hernández on 30 December 2003, and previous threats against him;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the attack and for all those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for immediate measures to guarantee the safety of Martín Barrios, and other members of the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos y Laborales del Valle de Tehuacán*, Human and Labour Rights Commission of the Tehuacán Valley, in accordance with their wishes;

- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Santiago Creel

Secretario de Gobernación

Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez

Delegación Cuauhtémoc

México D.F., C.P. 06600, MÉXICO

**Telegram:**      **Secretario de Gobernacion, Mexico D.F., Mexico**

**Fax:**             **+ 525 55 093 3414 / 093 3415**

**Salutation:**    **Señor Secretario / Dear Minister**

Governor of Puebla

Lic. Melquiades Morales Flores

Gobernador del Estado de Puebla

Palacio de Gobierno

Av. Reforma No. 711 Altos Col. Centro

Puebla 72009, Estado de Puebla, MÉXICO

**Telegram:**      **Gobernador del Estado de Puebla, Puebla, Mexico**

**Fax:**             **+52 222 213 8805**

**Salutation:**    **Señor Gobernador / Dear Governor**

Attorney General of Puebla

Lic. Héctor Maldonado Villagómez

Procurador del Estado de Puebla

Boulevard Héroes del 5 de Mayo Av. 31 Ote

Col. Ladrillera de Benítez

Puebla 75539, Estado de Puebla, MÉXICO

**Telegram:**      **Procurador del Estado de Puebla, Puebla, Mexico**

**Fax:**             **+ 52 222 240 8105**

**Salutation:**    **Señor Procurador/ Dear Attorney General**

**COPIES TO:**

Comisión de Derechos Humanos y Laborales del Valle de Tehuacán

(Human and Labour Rights Commission of the Tehuacán Valley)

Boulevard Heroe de Nacozary 210

Colonia Zaragoza

Tehuacán

C.P. 75770, Estado de Puebla, MÉXICO

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 3 March 2004.