

MEXICO Manuel Pérez Constantino,
Jesús Hernández Guitiérrez
Jerónimo Hernández López - Jesuit Priest

On 1 June 1999, Manuel Pérez Constantino was reportedly arbitrarily detained along with Jesús Hernández Guitiérrez, by members of the *Policía Judicial Estatal* (PJE), State Judicial Police, in Crucero Peñal, Chiapas State. Amnesty International fears for their safety, following reports that they had been beaten and threatened with death.

Amnesty International was informed that Manuel Pérez Constantino, coordinator of the *Xi'nich* indigenous organisation, while travelling on a bus, was stopped by an angry crowd of around 200 activists of the ruling *Partido de la Revolución Institucional* (PRI), Institutional Revolutionary Party, on 1 June 1999. The crowd were protesting against the setting up of a road block by supporters of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), the Zapatista National Liberation Army, an armed opposition group. Manuel Pérez was violently forced off the bus by the PRI members, who accused him of being a supporter of the EZLN and of setting up the road block the previous night. All this was done in the presence of members of the local police force who apparently did not intervene to protect them.

Jerónimo Hernández López, a Jesuit priest and advisor to *Xi'nich* drove past as policemen and some of the crowd were beating and interrogating Manuel Pérez Constantino. Members of the crowd stopped Father Hernández López, took him out of his car and accused of being a member of the EZLN. He was then taken to a nearby house where he was interrogated. There he noticed the presence of officials, including members of the *Policía de Seguridad Pública* (PSP), Public Security Police, as well as members of the Public Prosecutor's office.

After holding the two men for a few hours the officials from the PSP offered to escort both Jerónimo Hernández López and Manuel Pérez Constantino out of the community. However the crowd would not let Manuel Pérez leave. He was beaten once again and taken to another vehicle where members of the PJE detained him without the required arrest warrants. From there he was transported along with Jesús Hernández Guitiérrez, another detainee already held by the PJE, to Yajalón, Chiapas State. During this trip both Manuel Pérez and Jesús Hernández apparently received further beatings and death threats from one of the PJE officers.

Manuel Pérez Constantino and Jesús Hernández have since been charged with criminal offences and are being held in the *CERESO* No 5, a prison in San Cristóbal, Chiapas State. Jerónimo Hernández López has been released.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has long been documenting reported acts of violence by members of the Mexican authorities against alleged supporters of the EZLN in the state of Chiapas. Last year saw a spate of military operations against supposed EZLN members in the communities of Taniperla, Diez de Abril, Amparo Aguatinta, Nicolás Ruiz, and El Bosque, all in the state of Chiapas. This culminated in the arrest 167 people in Nicolás Ruiz - most of whom have been subsequently released without charge - in an operation which lasted six hours and involving hundreds of police and soldiers in June 1998.

In the light of these and similar actions the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights concluded, in a 1998 report, that "the emergence of new dissident armed groups of various types has led not only to a resumption of measures of control by the security forces but also to the indiscriminate repression of social organisations and leaders".

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

- asking the authorities to take adequate measures to guarantee the safety of Manuel Pérez Constantino and Jesús Hernández Guitiérrez;
- acknowledging that the authorities have a duty to maintain law and order and that this role must always be conducted according to international human rights standards;
- calling on the authorities to open a prompt, independent and thorough investigation into these events, with those under investigation for abuse of power to be suspended from duty, all results made public and those found responsible prosecuted in a civil court;
- calling for an investigation to be opened into circumstances surrounding the apparent illegal and arbitrary detentions of Manuel Pérez Constantino and Jesús Hernández Guitiérrez;
- urging the authorities assure that the detainees have access to a lawyer and their family.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of the State of Chiapas

Lic. Roberto Albores Guillén

Gobernador del Estado de Chiapas

Palacio de Gobierno, Piso 1, Col. Centro, 29000

Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Estado de Chiapas, MEXICO

Telegrams: Gobernador del Estado, Chiapas, México

Salutations: Sr. Procurador / Dear Governor

Attorney General of Chiapas

Lic. Jorge Hernández Aguilar

Procurador General de Chiapas

Procuraduría General de Chiapas

Tuxtla Gutierrez, Estado de Chiapas, MEXICO

Telegrams: Procurador del Estado, Chiapas, México

Faxes: + 52 961 65376 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Sr. Procurador / Dear State Attorney General

COPIES TO:

"Fray Bartolomé de las Casas" Human Rights Organization

Francisco León 5, Barrio de Santa Lucía

San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 29250, México

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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 16 July 1999.