

UA 122/96

Fear for safety

9 May 1996

MEXICO **Father Camilo Daniel, Catholic priest, human rights activist**
Mary Pérez de Soto (f), parish secretary of the above
 Camilo Soto Pérez, Mary's son
 Anita Soto Pérez (f), Mary's daughter

Concern for the safety of those named above has been fuelled by a series of threats, apparently made to try to stop Father Camilo Daniel, a well-known human rights activist in Chihuahua state, from continuing his work on behalf of the region's poor and dispossessed, particularly the indigenous population.

Father Camilo Daniel is a member of the *Comisión de Solidaridad y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos A.C.*, COSYDDHAC, the Commission for Solidarity and the Defence of Human Rights.

On 24 April, a letter came to Father Camilo Daniel's house with the following message: "*tuviera cuidado con los hijos de Maria, porque corren peligro, especialmente el pequeñito, ya que piensan pedirle dinero por él.*"

("you should take care of Mary's children because they are in danger, especially the little one, since someone is thinking of asking for money for him".) The threats apparently alluded to the possibility of kidnapping the son of Mary Pérez de Soto, the parish secretary.

On 28 April, a car with polarized glass and no license plates pulled into Mary Pérez de Soto's yard and drove slowly around for no apparent reason, and then left. On 29 April, Mary Pérez de Soto saw the same vehicle as she was taking her son to school.

On 30 April, another letter arrived at Father Camilo Daniel's home, this time stating: "*Sr. Camilo Daniel Pérez: le avisé del peligro de Mary y sus niños y no hizo caso, escoja COSYDDHAC o Camilito*" ("Mr. Camilo Daniel Pérez: I warned you and you didn't listen. Take your pick, COSYDDHAC or Camilito").

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

COSYDDHAC has been active in the defence of human rights in the state of Chihuahua for many years, often coming into conflict with local authorities because of its complaints against abuses allegedly committed by the state security forces. Lately COSYDDHAC and some other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), mainly peasant organizations, have been supporting 32 families of peasants and farmers from Nuevo Palanganas, Nuevo Casas Grande in Chihuahua state, after their violent eviction by members of the *Policía Judicial Estatal*, PJE, Estatal Judicial Police, on 17 March 1995. After legal recognition of their rights over the land, on 29 April 1996, a caravan of 50 peasants and farmers went to Nuevo Palanganas, together with some NGO members to protect and support them; Father Camilo Daniel was among these.

Some people close to Father Daniel Camilo, who have had a long relationship with COSYDDHAC, were also recently threatened. These include Javier Avila and Ricardo Robles, both Jesuits and members of COSYDDHAC. On 9 November 1995, Emilia González de Sandoval, another member of COSYDDHAC, was accused of "belonging to the extreme right", and trying to "destabilize the country". The accusation was made in a written communiqué by a previously-unknown group, calling themselves *Patria Primero* (Fatherland First) (see *Overcoming fear: human rights violations against women in Mexico*, AMR 41/09/96, March 1996).

Members of the Catholic Church and other grassroots organizations have been active in promoting and protecting the rights of the indigenous population in Mexico for many decades. They have frequently encountered opposition from the local authorities and large landowners. Church and human rights activists monitoring the human rights situation in states with large indigenous minorities or peasants, have faced a series of threats and attacks.

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

- expressing serious concern for the safety of Father Camilo Daniel, Mary Pérez de Soto, Camilo Soto Pérez and Anita Soto Pérez, following threats against them;
- calling for a prompt and thorough investigation into the threats and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the government to take immediate measures to guarantee the safety of Father Camilo Daniel, Mary Pérez de Soto, Camilo Soto Pérez and Anita Soto Pérez and the safety of all human rights activists and church members in Mexico.

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 5 271 1764

Salutation: Sr. President/Dear President

2) Governor of the State of Chihuahua

Lic. C. Francisco Barrio Terrazas
 Gobernador del Estado de Chihuahua
 Palacio de Gobierno
 Ciudad Juárez
 Estado de Chihuahua, MEXICO

Telegrams: Gobernador, Barrio Terrazas, Chihuahua, México

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador/Dear Governor

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, MÉXICO

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

Faxes: + 52 5 546 5350

Salutation: Sr. Secretario/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

1) Human rights organization

Sres. Comisión de Solidaridad y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos AC.
 Calle 24 esq. con Terrazas #3007
 Col. Pacífico CP. 31030
 Chihuahua, MEXICO

e-mail: cosyddhac@infosel.net.mx

Faxes: +52 1415 0486 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

2) Daily newspaper

Sr. Editor

La Jornada

Balderas 68

06050 México D.F., 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 4 July 1996.