

URGENT ACTION

VILLAGERS IN DANGER IN SOUTHERN MEXICO

People in the village of Ejido Jotolá, Chiapas state, southern Mexico, are at risk of attack from an armed group which is threatening people in the area. The group attacked a visiting human rights lawyer and shot one of the villagers. The authorities have done nothing to stop the armed group.

On 18 September, **Ricardo Lagunes Gasca**, a male lawyer working for a local NGO, the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Centre, was visiting Ejido Jotolá in Chilón municipality as he was advising clients there. As he was driving away, about 50 men and women, some armed with rifles and others with sticks and rocks, blocked the road. Ricardo Lagunes stopped the car and opened the window to talk to them. He told them he was a human rights lawyer, but some of the men grabbed him, hit his head with a rock and forced him out of the car saying they were going to lynch him. At that moment, residents from Ejido Jotolá intervened and Ricardo Lagunes managed to escape. However, in the violence that followed, one man from Ejido Jotolá, **Carmen Aguilar Gómez**, was shot in the thigh. Shortly before the attack, some of the attackers were seen talking to members of the state police (Policía Estatal Preventiva, PEP). Although they were called to intervene, the police did not turn up until after the attack.

According to the community, the attackers are part of an armed group known as the Organización para la Defensa de los Derechos Indígenas y Campesinos (Organisation for the Protection of Indigenous and Peasants' rights, OPDDIC). OPDDIC has been responsible for attacks and intimidation against communities in Chiapas believed to be sympathetic to the National Zapatista Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN). The EZLN is an armed opposition group which has been militarily inactive for many years, but continues to operate as a social and political movement in many areas of Chiapas. After the attack, armed members of OPDDIC occupied the local community centre (*casa ejidal*) for two days and are still in the area. The authorities have not taken action against them. The villagers are in danger, and there are fears that human rights activists working in the area may be at risk.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish, English or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to investigate the attack on Ricardo Lagunes and the shooting of Carmen Aguilar Gómez in Ejido Jotolá on 18 September, bring to justice those responsible, and establish why the police in the area did not intervene in a timely fashion to avoid the violence;
- urging them to protect the population of Ejido Jotolá and those living nearby, as well as human rights defenders working in the surrounding area, in accordance with their wishes;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without obstacles or fear of reprisals.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 NOVEMBER 2009 TO:

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Fernando Francisco Gómez-Mont
 Secretario de Gobernación
 Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez
 Del. Cuauhtémoc, México D.F.,
 C.P.06600, MEXICO
Fax: +52 55 5093 3414
Email: secretario@segob.gob.mx
Salutation: Señor Secretario/
Dear Minister

Attorney General of Chiapas

Mtro. Raciél López Salazar
 Procurador General de Justicia del
 Estado de Chiapas
 Libramiento Norte no. 2010, Col. El
 Bosque, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, CP
 29049, MEXICO
Fax: +52 961 616 5724
Email: raciel.lopez@mje.chiapas.gob.mx
Salutation: Dear Attorney General/
Señor Procurador

Chiapas Human Rights Commission

Lic. Juan Carlos Moreno Guillén
 Presidente de la Comisión Estatal de
 Derechos Humanos de Chiapas
 Blvd. Comitán 143, Col. Moctezuma,
 Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, MEXICO
**Fax: +52 961 639 6615 (if someone
 answers, say "me da tono de fax, por
 favor")**
Email: cdh@cdh-chiapas.org.mx
**Salutation: Señor Presidente/Dear
 President**

COPIES TO: Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, email: accionurgente@frayba.org.mx

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Human rights defenders in Mexico face threats, attacks, politically motivated criminal charges and imprisonment for leading protests or promoting respect for human rights. The government has agreed to provide protection measures ordered by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to several human rights defenders, but some have reported that no effective protection has been provided. Substantial efforts have not been made to investigate cases of abuses against human rights defenders; impunity is the general rule in these cases, leaving open the possibility of further attacks.

Threats and attacks by groups opposed to the EZLN, such as OPDDIC, against members of communities perceived as EZLN supporters remain common in the areas of Chiapas where the EZLN influence is contested. The failure of the authorities to tackle these groups has left many communities in fear of further attacks.

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