

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 41/67/97

UA 256/97

Fear for safety/ Death threats

1 August 1997

MEXICO Víctor Montano Pavon
Omar Vidal Hernández
Miguel Angel Munoz Velarde
Albino Chávez Hernández (minor)
Israel Mora Ponce
Miguel Luna Reyes
Francisco Hernández Acevedo
Francisco Moreno Ramírez
Wilfrido Ortiz Montesinos
(and their families)

Nine members of the indigenous community of Tepoztlán, Morelos State were arbitrarily detained on 28 July 1997 during a peaceful demonstration. The men, named above, suffered torture, including beatings and electric shocks. All were released without charge on 29 July but the police threatened them and their families with death if they made any formal complaint.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The state of Morelos has long been the scene of human rights violations by the security forces, mainly in the context of land disputes. Indigenous people and peasants are most often the victims of this violence.

A development company, in association with state authorities, has been attempting to build a multi-million dollar golf course and houses on communal land, which is regarded by the inhabitants of Tepoztlán as sacred. For months, local people, including women, children and the elderly, some of them members of the *Comité de Unidad Tepozteca* (CUT), Committee of Tepoztecan Unity, an indigenous peasant organization, have organized numerous peaceful actions in their struggle to stop the development, which has also been found to pose a serious threat to the environment, and to the water supply for the community. Such campaigning has led to a series of human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, torture, and ill-treatment.

On 10 April 1996, following one of the peaceful demonstrations, Marcos Olmedo Gutiérrez was unlawfully killed by members of the security forces. More than a hundred arrest warrants were issued against members of CUT and some arrests took place. Community activists, including minors, were repeatedly subjected to threats and ill-treatment. One of those previously arrested, Gerardo Demesa Padilla, a teacher, remains in detention as a prisoner of conscience. Three other community activists, Laurencio Guarneros Sandoval, Remigio Ayala Martínez and Carlos Ricardo Ruiz Canada also remain in detention as prisoners of conscience (see UA 14/97, AMR 41/01/97, 15 January 1997). A fifth person, Julio Bello Palacios, aged sixteen, arrested on 11 January has now been released, although Amnesty International is seeking further details about his torture.

Amnesty International delegations visited Tepoztlán in June and December 1996 and were able to interview a number of human rights defenders and community activists who had been ill-treated, threatened and imprisoned. The delegation confirmed the reports of human rights violations against those active in promoting and protecting human rights.

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

- calling for immediate and effective steps to guarantee the safety of those arbitrarily detained on 28 July 1997;
- expressing deep concern about the torture suffered by those named in this Urgent Action and calling for a prompt and thorough investigation into their torture and threats;
- calling for the findings of this investigation to be made public, for those responsible to be brought to justice and for the victims to be compensated;
- urging for immediate measures to be taken to address human rights violations committed by security forces against inhabitants and community activists in Tepoztlán.

APPEALS TO:

1) Attorney General of the Republic
Lic. Jorge Madrazo Cuellar
Procuraduría General de la República
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Col. Guerrero
06300 México D.F., MEXICO

Telegrams: Sr. Procurador de la República, México D.F.

Fax: +52 5 626 4419/4430

Salutation: Sr. Procurador de la República/Dear Attorney

2) Governor of the State of Morelos
Governor of the state of Morelos
Lic. Jorge Carrillo Olea
Gobernador del Estado de Morelos
Palacio de Gobierno Cuernavaca
Estado de Morelos, MEXICO

Fax: 52 73 11 3020 (*if a voice responds, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor"*)

Telegrams: Gobernador Morelos, Mexico

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

1) Centro de Derechos Humanos
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and to diplomatic representatives of MEXICO accredited to your country and environmental NGOs in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 September 1997.