

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 53/14/00

UA 332/00

Death threat / Fear for safety

30 October 2000

VENEZUELA

Pemón indigenous people in Santa Cruz de Maupari
Melchor Flores (Indian chief)

Indigenous people protesting against the construction of an electricity supply network in Venezuela's Gran Sabana region have reportedly received death threats. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety, and for the safety of their chief, Melchor Flores.

In early October, Pemón indigenous people living in the community of Santa Cruz de Maupari, state of Bolívar, found a school exercise book (*cuaderno de colegio*) on a road leading out of the village, in which the following words were written in capital letters on each page: "INDIOS MALDITOS - LOS BAMOS A MATAR A TODOS" (sic), "BLOODY INDIANS - WE ARE GOING TO KILL THE LOT OF YOU". They suspected the book had been deliberately left on the road by soldiers at a nearby army base.

A week later employees with a construction company told some youngsters from the community, whom they were giving a lift, that workers on the electricity supply network project were being armed, ready to kill the community's inhabitants.

Pemón Indian chief (*Cacique*) Melchor Flores complained about the threats to an army commander responsible for troops stationed in the region, and showed him the school exercise book. The commander told the chief that the threats had been written by someone from the indigenous group.

Separate complaints about the threats have been filed before the offices of the Ombudsman and the Attorney (*la Defensoría del Pueblo y Fiscalía*).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Pemón indigenous community are protesting against the construction of an electricity supply network (*tendido eléctrico*) running pylons and high voltage cables across Venezuela's Canaima National Park, Imataca Forest Reserve and the Gran Sabana region. Work on the network began in 1997 following an agreement for Venezuela to supply northern Brazil with electricity.

In April the indigenous people of Santa Cruz de Maupari issued a declaration to protest that the network would irreversibly damage the environment and their way of life. Several Venezuelan non-governmental organizations (NGOs) later added their names to the protest. Brazilian NGOs have also protested about the network's effect on indigenous communities in northern Brazil.

In December 1999 a new Constitution came into force in Venezuela, which includes provisions for the protection of indigenous peoples and their environment. It also provides for the protection of human rights and states that international human rights treaties and conventions are an integral part of the rule of law in Venezuela.

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

- expressing concern that members of the Pemón indigenous community from Santa Cruz de Maupari have reportedly received death threats;
- urging the authorities to take the necessary steps to guarantee the safety of the Pemón indigenous group and its chief, Cacique Melchor Flores;
- calling for a prompt and independent investigation into the death threats, with the findings made public and those responsible brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

2

Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías
Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Palacio de Miraflores
Caracas
Venezuela

Salutation: Señor Presidente

Fax: + 582 806 3325

Minister of the Interior and Justice
Sr. Luis Alfonso Dávila
Ministro del Interior y Justicia
Ministerio del Interior y Justicia
Avenida Urdaneta Esquina de Platanal
Edificio Interior y Justicia
Caracas
Venezuela

Salutation: Señor Ministro

Fax: + 582 861 1967 / 0363

State Governor
Antonio Rojas Suarez
Gobernador del Estado Bolivar
Calle Constitución
Casa de los Gobernadores
Ciudad Bolivar
Venezuela

Salutation: Señor Gobernador

Fax: + 588 301285

COPIES TO:

Indigenous rights organisation
AMIGRANSA
Apartado Postal 50460,
Caracas 1050-A
Venezuela

COALICION CONTRA EL TENDIDO ELECTRICO MINERO VENEZUELA-BRASIL
AMIGRANS @ccs.internet.ve,
jorgepadronc@cantv.net,
Anaponte@ ven.net

and to diplomatic representatives of VENEZUELA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 December 2000.