

# URGENT ACTION

## HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVERS ATTACKED IN MEXICO

**Human rights activists in Oaxaca state, Mexico, are at serious risk following an attack on human rights observers on 27 April, which left at least two dead and scores injured. The authorities have not done enough to investigate the incident and the whereabouts of five people who are still missing following the attack, or to protect those affected.**

On 27 April a group of about 30 human rights observers was ambushed by armed men in the Indigenous Triqui area of Oaxaca state, southern Mexico. Human rights groups in Mexico believe that this was a planned attack by a paramilitary group that had previously threatened the human rights observers. The observers were attacked after they were forced to stop their journey because rocks were blocking the road. One man, observer Jyri Antero Jaakola from Finland, and one woman, Indigenous human rights defender Beatriz Cariño (head of the organization CACTUS in Oaxaca state) were killed. Sources in Mexico suggest five people are missing, and may have been taken hostage by the attackers. The five, all Mexican, are journalists **David Cilia** and **Erika Ramírez** (the only woman among those missing), and three activists: **Fernando Santiago** (a member of Mexican organization Brigadas Indigenas) and **David Venegas** and **Noé Bautista** (members of Oaxacan group VOCAL). Some of those wounded in the ambush were apparently initially taken hostage and later released. Sources in Mexico suggest they were told to pass on the following message to Omar Esparza, a leading member of the Oaxacan organizations CACTUS and MAIZ: "Tell him that he escaped this one, but he will be next" ("*Digale que de esta se libró pero él es el que sigue*").

Days before the attack, the human rights defenders organizing the trip requested that the state authorities protect the observers, but no protection was provided. Following the attack, federal and state authorities did not go to the scene of the ambush until the day after the attack, claiming this was due to security concerns. Victims and witnesses who managed to identify some of the attackers have not been interviewed; nor have they been offered protection by the authorities. Evidence at the scene of the incident is yet to be gathered by investigators.

### **PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language, calling on the Mexican authorities to:**

- carry out an urgent, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack on the human rights observers, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- immediately do everything necessary to find all those who are still missing;
- provide adequate and immediate medical assistance to all those wounded and affected by the attack;
- take immediate steps to protect all those affected by the attack, in accordance to their wishes;
- publicly condemn the attack and reinforce its commitment to the protection of human rights defenders in Mexico with prompt and effective action.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 JUNE 2010 TO:**

#### President

Lic. Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa  
Residencia Oficial de "Los Pinos", Casa Miguel Alemán  
Col. San Miguel Chapultepec  
México D.F., C.P. 11850, MÉXICO  
**Fax: + 52 55 50 93 53 21**  
**E-mail: felipe.calderon@presidencia.gob.mx**  
**Salutation: Señor Presidente / Dear President Calderón**

#### Attorney General of the Republic

Lic. Arturo Chávez Chávez  
Procuraduría General de la República  
Av. Paseo de la Reforma nº 211-213  
Col. Cuauhtémoc, Delegación Cuauhtémoc  
México D.F., C.P. 06500, MÉXICO  
**Fax: +52 55 53 46 09 08**  
**Email: ofproc@pgr.gob.mx**  
**Salutation: Señor Procurador General / Dear Attorney General**

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

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The group was on its way to document long-running human rights abuses in the Indigenous Triqui area, and to provide some humanitarian assistance. The victims of the attack included several members of Mexican organizations and networks, and international observers from Finland, Germany, Italy and Belgium.

Human rights defenders in Mexico face serious and constant human rights abuses. Those working to redress the historical neglect of economic, social and cultural rights are at heightened risk of abuse, and, therefore, are most in need of recognition, protection and support. Among them, the situation of Indigenous human rights defenders is of particular concern. Those leading efforts to break the cycle of exclusion, inequality, poverty and other human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples are paying a high price.

The authorities in Oaxaca have for many years been unwilling to investigate grave human rights violations committed in the state.

Felicitas Martínez and Teresa Bautista, two young Indigenous human rights defenders and journalists, colleagues of Bety Cariño, were killed on 7 April 2008. They were ambushed as they were travelling from to their radio station "The Voice that Breaks the Silence (*La voz que rompe el silencio*) – based in the mainly Indigenous town of San Juan Copala, Oaxaca State. No one has been brought to justice for this crime.

The Triqui region is one of the poorest and most troubled in the country. For more than 30 years it has been riven by inter-community conflict in which scores of people have been killed. The authorities have rarely taken action to hold those responsible to account.

In Oaxaca state in June 2006, widespread protests erupted in a campaign to force the state governor to resign. Political violence and demonstrations continued throughout the year. At least 18 civilians were killed during the conflict, including American journalist Brad Will; at least 370 were injured and 349 were arrested. There was widespread use of excessive force, arbitrary detention, torture and fabrication of criminal charges against protesters. In 2009, a special investigation by Mexico's Supreme Court concluded that senior state officials should be held accountable for human rights violations committed during the crisis. However, virtually none of the federal, state or municipal authorities responsible for abuses have been held to account. Human rights organizations are still campaigning for justice over the human rights violations.

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