

PUBLIC

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UA 102/06 Fear for safety/Threats

21 April 2006

ECUADOR **María Diocelinda Iza Quinatoa (f) President of the women's section of the *Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas de Cotopaxi* (UNOCANC), Cotopaxi Peasants Organizations' Union
Her relatives
UNOCANC staff members**

Indigenous leader, María Iza Quinatoa, has reportedly been the target of an increasing campaign of threats and intimidation. Amnesty International believes that this may be linked to her campaigning work against the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Ecuador and the USA. The organization is concerned for her safety, and that of her family and other members of the staff at UNOCANC.

María Iza Quinatoa was responsible for coordinating the participation in the capital Quito, of Cotopaxi indigenous communities in mass demonstrations against the FTA in March and April 2006. Indigenous organizations believe that the FTA will have a negative impact on local producers and trade. On 10 April, she participated in a meeting with other indigenous leaders in Quito. Afterwards, as she walked down the street she was allegedly threatened with a knife by two unknown women. One of the women asked her "*ya nuevamente vienes a organizar las movilizaciones?*" "Are you back here organizing the demonstrations?" Her rucksack which contained confidential documents as well as personal identification was then reportedly stolen.

María Iza Quinatoa reported the incident to the National Judicial Police in Quito on the same day. Although she insisted that she was robbed, the police officer allegedly registered the complaint as lost documents. Two days later, on 12 April she again reported the incident to the National Judicial Police in Cotopaxi, where similarly the officer in charge completed a form for lost identification documents. Amnesty International is aware that an investigation has not been opened into this incident and is concerned that her complaint has not been taken seriously.

Previously, on 23 March, María Iza Quinatoa had attended a meeting with indigenous leaders, organizing demonstrations and events in Quito. Whilst she was at that meeting, a van belonging to her family which was parked nearby, was stolen. Her husband Luis Tigse Alomoto reported the incident to the Pichincha Judicial Police Headquarters. The police officer who received the complaint told him "*es que esto pasa por estar en movilizaciones, ya ve hasta el carro se pierde*" "This happened because you participated in the demonstrations. You see, you even lost your car".

In the months prior to these incidents, María Iza Quinatoa reportedly told local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that she had received several threatening phone calls on her home telephone number until she changed it.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 1 February 2004, an assassination attempt was made on Maria Iza Quinatoa's brother, Leonidas Iza, a former President of the *Confederation de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE), Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) in Quito. He escaped unharmed, but four of his relatives, including María Iza Quinatoa's son Daniel Tigse, who were accompanying him at the time of the attack were injured. This incident had taken place at the time Leonidas Iza had arrived from Cuba, where he had taken part in a meeting against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). (See UA 36/04, AMR 28/002/2004, 3 February 2004 and follow up).

Amnesty International has often expressed its deep concern about the continued threatening and harassment of those who are critical of the government's policies, including human rights defenders, journalists and indigenous community leaders. The organization has urged Ecuadorian authorities on several occasions to send a clear message that such threats will not be tolerated, to ensure that human rights defenders, journalists and community leaders are able to work without fear of intimidation. It has also called upon the authorities to investigate these threats and bring perpetrators to justice. However, nobody has been charged in connection with these acts of intimidation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of María Iza Quinatoa, her relatives and other staff members at UNOCANC, following an increasing campaign of threats and intimidation;
- expressing concern that it appears that legal complaints by María Iza Quinatoa and her husband, Luis Tigse Alomoto, were not taken seriously by the judicial police;
- asking the authorities to take the complaints seriously and order a prompt and effective investigation into the acts of intimidation and the robbery, for the findings to be made public, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of María Iza Quinatoa, her family and of other members of the staff of UNOCAN, according to their wishes.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior

Dr. Felipe Vega de la Cuadra
Ministro de Gobierno, Policía,
Justicia, Cultos y Municipalidades
Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía
Benalcázar y Espejo
Quito, Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 2581030 / 258 0067 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor".
It may be difficult to get through to these numbers, please keep trying.)

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Acting Attorney General

Dra. Cecilia Armas Tobar
Ministra Fiscal Subrogante
Fiscalía General del Estado
Av. Eloy Alfaro N°32-240 y República
Quito, Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 255 9957 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Acting Attorney General/Sra. Ministra Fiscal Subrogante

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organization

Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos
"Segundo Montes Mozo SJ@ CSMM
Nicolás Jiménez, E 4, 223, piso 5 y Av. 12 de Octubre, Dep. E- 3
Quito, Ecuador
Casilla: 17-08-8069
Quito, Ecuador

E-mail: montesdh@uio.satnet.net

and to diplomatic representatives of Ecuador accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 June 2006.