

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

ECUADOR

Guadalupe de Heredia (f)	
Her family	
Dr Alejandro Ponce Villacís (m)]
Dr Pablo Fajardo Mendoza (m)] Members of the legal team
representing	
Ermel Chávez Parra (m)] indigenous communities in action
Cármén Allauca (f)] against ChevronTexaco
Luis Yanza (m)]

Guadalupe de Heredia has been the target of a campaign of intimidation, which has included violent attacks. She is the press officer of the legal team representing indigenous communities taking legal action against the multinational oil company ChevronTexaco for failing to clean up the pollution caused by decades of drilling in the oil-rich Sucumbios region. Amnesty International fears that her life and those of her family may be in danger. The attack on her is also believed to be aimed at intimidating the legal team working on the case. Five lawyers and human rights defenders from this team, named above, have been threatened before.

On 29 April, a truck with no license plates attempted to force her car off the road and into a ditch, as she was travelling with her daughter near her home in the capital, Quito. She reported this to the Prosecutor's office in Quito on 12 May.

On 21 April a female friend of Guadalupe de Heredia came to visit her at her home, and was reportedly attacked by two men as she came through the gate. One of them beat her about the head, while the other stole her notebook. The woman offered her purse to the man who was beating her, to try to make him stop. He showed no interest in her purse, or her jewellery, but eventually both men ran to a car and drove off, taking her purse. Guadalupe de Heredia's family found their friend bleeding from head wounds. Amnesty International believes the men may have attacked the woman by mistake, thinking she was Guadalupe de Heredia; she reported the attack to the police the same day.

It is not known whether the police have completed an investigation into these incidents. On 28 April, human rights NGOs petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to extend existing precautionary measures to members of the legal team to Guadalupe de Heredia. To Amnesty International's knowledge the authorities have not given her any protection.

The five members of the legal team named above have suffered repeated acts of intimidation and death threats. Amnesty International wrote to the Ecuadorian authorities on 21 November 2005 and 8 March 2006, expressing serious concern at this, and called on the authorities to investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice, but the authorities are not known to have taken any action, or offered any protection to the lawyers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Texaco (which merged with Chevron in 2001 to form ChevronTexaco) was drilling for oil in the north of Ecuador from 1964 to 1992. During that time, the lawsuit against the company alleges, the oil company dumped carcinogenic waste in unlined pits, rather than dispose of it properly, in order to save money.

The case is being heard in the Superior Court of Sucumbios, in the town of Lago Agrio.

On 22 December 2005, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ordered the Ecuadorean government to provide protection to four of the lawyers named above, Alejandro Ponce Villacis, Pablo Fajardo Mendoza, Ermel Chávez Parra and Luis Yanza. To Amnesty International's knowledge the Ecuadorean government has not provided them with the protection they have requested.

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

- expressing concern at reports that human rights defender Guadalupe de Heredia and all the members of the legal team have suffered a violent campaign of intimidation;
- asking the authorities to order a prompt and effective investigation into this intimidation, with the findings made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to comply with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' request for precautionary measures, and to take steps to guarantee her safety, her family and of all the legal team members, in accordance with their own wishes.

APPEALS TO: (It may be difficult to get through to these fax numbers: please keep trying.)

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 2282770 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Minister of Energy and Mines

Ing. Iván Rodríguez Ramos
Ministro de Energía y Minas, Ministerio de Energía y Minas
Juan León Mera Nº 26-220 y Orellana, Quito, Ecuador

Fax: +593 2 2906 350 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Acting Attorney General

Dra. Cecilia Armas Tobar
Ministra Fiscal Subrogante, Fiscalía General del Estado
Av. Eloy Alfaro Nº32-240 y República, Quito, Ecuador

Fax: +593 2 255 9959 (ask for "Extension uno-zero-cuatro" and then "tono de fax, por favor")

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

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organisation

Frente de la Defensa de la Amazonía
José Abascal E 1279
y Portete esquina, Quito, Ecuador

Email: casotexaco@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 27 June 2006.