

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 34/013/2007

1 May 2007

Further Information on UA 49/07 (AMR 34/012/2007, 1 March 2007) Fear for safety

GUATEMALA **Leonardo Ramírez (m), President of the New San José las Lágrimas Association (Asociación Nueva San José las Lágrimas) and member of the Committee of Peasant Unity (Comité de Unidad Campesina – CUC)**
Other members of the New San José las Lágrimas Association

New name: Abelardo Roldan (m), CUC Regional Coordinator

Armed men attempted to abduct CUC Regional Coordinator Abelardo Roldan from a meeting with government representatives on 18 April, in the San José las Lágrimas community, Chiquimula Department. Amnesty International believes his life is in danger.

The meeting, where San José las Lágrimas community representatives discussed the allocation of land to the community with government representatives and the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office as well as the CUC, had nearly finished when five armed men allegedly burst in at around 4pm. The men asked, "Where is Abelardo Roldan? We have a score to settle with him." (*Donde está Abelardo Roldan, el dirigente del CUC, para arreglar cuentas con él?*) The government representatives asked the men to leave, as they hadn't been invited to the meeting. The men allegedly responded that "You may well be in charge of things, but we don't care, because we're not answerable to you, and we make our own law with guns (*Muy autoridad pueden ser, pero nos importa poco, porque somos particulares y hacemos nuestra propia ley, con las armas*). Another 15 armed men were reportedly waiting outside the building. The abduction attempt was reportedly prevented only by the actions of community members and government representatives, who stopped the armed men from dragging Abelardo Roldan outside.

Abelardo Roldan was able to leave with the government representatives in their private plane. The vehicle in which the CUC commission had arrived was driven back by a representative of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office. As this vehicle and two others left the farm, they passed two cars, in which there were more armed men.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The attempted abduction of Abelardo Roldan occurs in the context of an on-going land dispute. The rural workers of the San José las Lágrimas community were threatened with eviction from the farmland where they live and work in February 2007, and are currently in negotiations with government authorities over the allocation of land to community members. The army are occupying another part of the farm, where there is allegedly a mass grave of people killed by the armed forces during the internal armed conflict (1960-1996).

Several Association members have been killed in the past five months. On 13 February, Vicente Ramírez López and four other members of the Association were attacked on the farm by four armed men, who shot Vicente Ramírez dead. The rural workers managed to catch two of the gunmen, who claimed the army had sent them, and handed them over to the police. The two men were later imprisoned, but there are unconfirmed reports that they were subsequently freed.

On 14 December 2006 Matías Hernández, a member of the Association's Executive Board, was shot dead as he worked in his field.

Apparent acts of intimidation against community members have also been reported. On 6 January 2007 three houses in the hamlet of El Chapulín, belonging to members of the New San José las Lágrimas Association, were burnt down. The houses, which are several hours' walk from the San José las Lágrimas farm, were empty at the time.

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

- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the safety of all of those involved in the negotiation process to settle the San José las Lágrimas land dispute;
- pressing the authorities to ensure the speedy resolution of the outstanding land dispute issues affecting the San José las Lágrimas community;
- urging the authorities to order an immediate and thorough investigation into the 18 April attempted abduction of Abelardo Roldan, the 13 February killing of Vicente Ramírez, the 14 December 2006 killing of Matías Hernández, and the reported threats to the life of Leonardo Ramírez (UA 49/07), and to bring those responsible to justice;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations to recognize the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's office

Lic. Juan Luis Florido

Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público

Edificio Ministerio Público

15 Avenida 15-16, Zona 1, Barrio Gerona, 8vo. Nivel, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: +502 2411 9124

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Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Estimado Sr. Fiscal General

Minister of Interior

Adela Camacho de Torrebiarte

Ministro de Gobernación

6a. Avenida 13-71, Zona 1,

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2413 8658

Salutation: Dear Minister/Estimada Sra. Ministra

COPIES TO:

Comité de Unidad Campesina

31 Avenida A 14-46, Zona 7, Ciudad de Plata 2

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2434 9500 (if a voice answers, say "tono de fax, por favor")

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 June 2007.