

UA 119/99

Fear for**HONDURAS José Ofelio López, 45**

José Ofelio López, a member of the Lenca indigenous group, was reportedly beaten while being taken into custody by members of the *Policía Nacional Civil*, National Civilian Police, in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, on 9 May 1999. He has not been seen since and it is feared he has "disappeared".

José López, from Santa Cruz del Rosario, municipality of Yamaranguila, Intibuca Department, is a member of the *Comité Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas* (COPIN), Civic Committee of Popular and Indigenous Organizations. He was seized at the main entrance of the Teaching Hospital, where he was visiting his son, Marcelino López Manueles, who was a patient there. According to reports, one of the policemen involved later acknowledged to José López's brother that he had participated in José López's arrest and that he had hit him because "he resisted arrest".

COPIN has expressed concern that José López may have been beaten and arrested in retaliation for his participation, together with other members of COPIN, in a demonstration protesting against an amendment to the Law of the National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights. This amendment, which would have limited the office's scope for action and reduced the Commissioner's period of office, was approved by the National Congress of Honduras on 20 April 1999 (See UA 89/99, AMR 37/03/99). The amendment was later withdrawn as a result of strong national and international opposition and protests.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights violations against indigenous peoples in Honduras have been a matter of concern for Amnesty International for many years. According to reports at least 25 people from different ethnic groups, some of them involved in the defence of the rights of their peoples, have been murdered, reportedly extrajudicially executed, in the 1990s. To date no one has been brought to justice for these murders.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of José Ofelio López;
- calling for his whereabouts to be made known to his family and for him to be immediately released unless charged with a recognizable criminal offence;
- calling for prompt and thorough investigations into the "disappearance" of José Ofelio López, for the findings to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- expressing concern at reports that José Ofelio López was beaten at the time of his arrest.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic
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Presidente de la República de Honduras
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Fax: + 504 235 6949

E-mail: law_bureau@hotmail.com
Telegrams: Presidente, Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Salutation: Sr. Presidente

Minister of Defence and Public Security
Elizabeth Chiuz Sierra
Ministra de Defensa Nacional y Seguridad Pública
Palacio de los Ministerios, 2° piso
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Fax: + 504 239 6892
Telegrams: Ministra Seguridad Pública, Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Salutation: Sra. Ministra

Head of the Public Security Forces
Col. Álvaro Manuel Flores Ponce
Comandante General de la Policía Nacional Civil
Cuartel Casamata, Barrio Casamata
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Fax: + 504 237 9070
Telegrams: Comandante Gral. PNC, Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Salutation: Sr. Colonel

COPIES TO:

Director of the Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Lic Octavio Solomón Núñez
Director de la Oficina de Derechos Humanos del
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Colonia Miraflores
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Salutation: Sr. Director

Comité de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH)
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and to diplomatic representatives of Honduras accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 July 1999.