

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety / Death Threat

4 March 2003

MEXICO

Samuel Alfonso Castellanos Piñón, (m) - lawyer
Beatriz Casas Arellanes, (f) - lawyer
Others working with the Oaxaca regional office of *Acción de los Cristianos para la Abolición de la Tortura*, (ACAT), Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture

Carlos Cruz Mozo, (m)] members the *Organización Indígena de Derechos*
Inocencio López Michel, (m)] *Humanos de Oaxaca* (OIDHO), Oaxaca Indigenous
Human Rights Organization

On 1 March 2003 Samuel Alfonso Castellanos Piñón and Beatriz Casas Arellanes received an anonymous death threat at the *Acción de los Cristianos para la Abolición de la Tortura*, (ACAT), Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture office in Oaxaca city. The letter also contained threats against Carlos Cruz Mozo and Inocencio López Michel. Later the same day Samuel Alfonso Castellanos was followed by unidentified men. Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of all the above.

The letter to ACAT, containing threats and insults, warned that if Samuel Alfonso Castellanos would be killed if he did not stop acting as defence lawyer to those charged in relation to the Agua Fria murders in 2002. The letter also contained insults and threats against the others named above also in connection with the Agua Fria cases. On the same evening, Samuel Alfonso Castellanos left the ACAT office and was openly followed by an unknown man. Shortly after, on the way to his bus stop, he noticed two other men following him. All three men overtly indicated they were carrying arms beneath their clothing.

The Agua Fria (Oaxaca State) killings of May 2002 caused national outrage. A total of 26 indigenous people were gunned down. In the following days, under intense pressure, the state authorities carried out reportedly arbitrary detentions of at least 26 members of neighbouring communities in connection with the murders. In July 2002 ACAT members presented a visiting Amnesty International delegation with testimonies from those detained alleging that they had suffered torture in order to extract their confessions. In October 2002 Samuel Alfonso Castellanos and Beatriz Casas Arellanes formally became defence lawyers to the accused, challenging their detention and denouncing the torture. As a result of their work, 16 people have since been released on bail, while 10 others remain on remand. On 24 February 2003 the courts granted an appeal in favour of the remaining 10 detainees after which Samuel Alfonso Castellanos made a number of statements to the press highlighting the irregularities and abuses in the proceedings and calling for their release.

The threats and intimidation have been reported to the *Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado* (State Public Prosecutor's Office), and the *Comision Estatal de Derechos Humanos* (State Human Rights Commission).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Those who struggle to defend the rights of others in Mexico have often been the first to come under attack, and to have their own rights violated and their safety threatened. Human rights defenders and community activists have frequently been the target of threats, harassment and smear campaigns in Oaxaca State. Those responsible are usually never brought to justice.

Amnesty International continues to receive frequent reports confirming the widespread use of torture throughout Mexico. Officials responsible are rarely brought to justice and victims continue to be prosecuted and convicted on the basis of evidence gathered through the use of torture.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the human rights defenders: Samuel Alfonso Castellanos Piñón, Beatriz Casas Arellanes, Carlos Cruz Mozo and Inocencio López Michel and calling for immediate measures to be taken to guarantee their safety in accordance with their wishes;
- calling for an immediate, full and impartial investigation into the threat and intimidation against those named above on 1 March 2003;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals.

APPEALS TO:

Director of Human Rights - Interior Ministry
Maestro Ricardo Sepúlveda
Secretaría de Gobernación
Reforma 99, PISO 21, PH
Colonia Tabacalera
C.P. 06030
Mexico D.F. México

Telegram: Director of Human Rights - Interior Ministry, Colonia Tabacalera, México
Fax: +52 (please try with or without a 55 here and then...) 51 28 02 34/ 02 24
Email: rsepulveda@segob.gob.mx
Salutation: Estimado Maestro/Dear Sir

Governor of Oaxaca

Lic. José Murat Casab
Gobernador del Estado de Oaxaca
Palacio de Gobierno
Bustamante s/n, Oaxaca
Oaxaca 68000 México

Telegram: Governor of Oaxaca, Oaxaca, México
Faxes: +52 951 51 637 37
Salutation: Señor Gobernador / Dear Governor

Attorney General of Oaxaca

Lic. Sergio H. Santibañez
Procurador del Estado de Oaxaca
Avenida Luis Echeverría s/n, La Experimental
San Antonio de la Cal, Oaxaca
Oaxaca 71236 México

Telegram: Attorney General of Oaxaca, Oaxaca, México
Fax: +52-951 51 56 786 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")
Salutation: Dear Sir/ Señor Procurador

Human Rights Commission of Oaxaca

Dr. Sergio Segreste Rios
Presidente de la Comisión de Derechos
Humanos del Estado de Oaxaca
Calle de los Derechos Humanos No. 210
Col. América
68050, Oaxaca,
México

Telegrams: Human Rights Commission of Oaxaca, Oaxaca, México
Faxes: +52- 951 51 35 197 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")
E-mail: cedohax@infosel.net.mx
Salutation: Dear Sir/ Estimado Señor

COPIES TO:

ACAT México, Huatusco 21. Colonia Roma Sur, CP. 10200. México, DF.
acat@att.net.mx

and to diplomatic representatives of MEXICO accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 April 2003.