

# MEXICO

## Prisoners of Conscience - Environmentalists Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera

Amnesty International considers Rodolfo Montiel Flores and Teodoro Cabrera García, two peasant environmental activists from the state of Guerrero in southern Mexico, to be prisoners of conscience. The organization believes they are currently in detention solely because of their peaceful activism in favour of protecting the forests in Guerrero's mountains from excessive logging. Amnesty International is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera are founding members of the *Organización de Campesinos Ecologistas de la Sierra de Petatlán y Coyuca de Catalán*, Peasant Environmentalist Organization of the Mountains of Petatlán and Coyuca de Catalán. The organization was established in 1998 in order to stop logging operations in the region which they claim are threatening the environment and the livelihood of local peasant communities.

Local economic interests which promoted and benefited from the logging operations apparently saw the emergence of this environmentalist group as a threat. Subsequently, members of the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion (*40a Batallón de Infantería*) of the Mexican Army, ostensibly assigned to counter-insurgency and anti-narcotics operations in the region, reportedly began a campaign of harassment and threats against the group. For example, in July 1998, members of the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion questioned and threatened Rodolfo Montiel, and warned that his family would face reprisals if he reported the incident.

On 2 May 1999 Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera were arbitrarily detained by members of the battalion in the community of Pizotla, in the municipality of Ajuchitlán, Guerrero state. While in the incommunicado custody of the military, the two men were reportedly tortured in order to force them to sign self-incriminating confessions. They were subsequently charged with drugs- and firearms-related crimes. Since then they have been held in detention in a civilian prison awaiting trial before a federal judge in the 5<sup>th</sup> District Court of Iguala (*Juzgado Quinto de Distrito de Iguala*), Guerrero state. The court is expected to reach a verdict at the end of April 2000.

Amnesty International believes that Rodolfo Montiel Flores and Teodoro Cabrera García are prisoners of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally because:

- their peaceful activism to protect the forests of the Sierra de Petatlán, Guerrero state, from excessive logging is the sole reason for their detention;
- the two men have been detained and falsely charged in order to silence them and their environmental group;

- evidence against them is based on self-incriminating confessions reportedly extracted under torture;
- independent reports vouch for both men's integrity and commitment to non-violent activism.

Amnesty International seeks the immediate and unconditional release of any person detained or otherwise physically restricted by reason of his or her political, religious or other

**KEYWORDS:** PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE1 / ENVIRONMENTALISTS1