

PUBLIC

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UA 53/06 Fear for safety

MEXICO Ernesto Ledesma Arronte (m), human rights defender

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The house of human rights defender Ernesto Ledesma Arronte was broken into in February in what appears to have been an attempt to intimidate him because of his human rights work and political activism. Amnesty International believes that he is in danger.

Ernesto Ledesma Arronte is a founder member and director of the human rights organization *Centro de Análisis Político e Investigaciones Sociales y Económicas* (CAPISE), the Centre for Political Analysis and Social and Economic Research. On 26 February he reportedly returned to his home in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas state from a work trip that had lasted several days. He found that his front door had been forced. Inside he found work-related documents scattered around the living room, and personal letters and family photographs carefully spread out on his bed. Nothing was stolen, indicating that the break-in was intended as a threat to deter him from his human rights work. Ernesto Ledesma has filed a complaint with the State Public Prosecutor's Office San Cristobal de las Casas (the Sub-fiscalía Especial Regional Zona Altos).

Ernesto Ledesma Arronte received death threats in 2003. The official investigation did not identify the perpetrator. He reportedly received no further threats after an Urgent Action was issued (UA 13/03, AMR 41/001/2003, 13 January 2003).

Local human rights organizations believe that the break-in may be part of a pattern of threats, intimidation and harassment of activists who are involved in a nationwide peaceful civilian political campaign, *La Otra Campaña* (The Other Campaign). This campaign was announced in 2005 at an assembly of the Chiapas-based armed opposition group the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), Zapatista National Liberation Army. It was launched in January 2006 to coincide with the presidential election campaign, and seeks to mobilise leftwing grassroots organizations and raise social and political issues, including indigenous rights. Ernesto Ledesma Arronte had taken part in *Otra Campaña* activities in Chiapas.

Another activist, Dámaso Villanueva Ramírez, who is a member of the *Comité Ciudadano para la Defensa Popular* (COCIDEP), the Citizens' Committee for the Defence of the People, was detained on 24 February while he was distributing information about the *Otra Campaña*. A warrant for his arrest had been issued in October 2005, for damaging property, but had not been acted on. He denies any involvement in the offence.

Trade unionist Mario Alvarado Rodríguez, from the Chiapas municipality of Palenque, has been active in the *Otra Campaña*. He had been arrested in 2004 on charges that he had provoked an illegal land occupation, though the charges were dropped on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence. In January 2006, landowners reportedly had the arrest warrant reactivated. Mario Alvarado won an injunction against the reissuing of the warrant and is presenting evidence to clear his name.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Social activists and human rights defenders have frequently been the target of threats, harassment, smear campaigns and spurious criminal charges, particularly from the state and municipal authorities. Those responsible are rarely identified or brought to justice, principally because official investigations are ineffective. The authorities also often fail to demonstrate that they are committed to the legitimate role of human rights defenders in the country.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Ernesto Ledesma Arronte, whose house was broken into in February, apparently to intimidate him and deter him from his human rights work and political activism;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee his safety and that of his family, and to ensure that he receives protection in accordance with his wishes;
- calling for a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation into the break-in, for the findings to be published and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that 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 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:**

Governor of Chiapas

Lic. Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía  
Gobernador del Estado de Chiapas,  
Palacio de Gobierno, Piso 1, Col. Centro 29000, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico.

**Fax:** + 52 961 61 209 17

+ 52 961 61 256 18 (if someone answers, ask “tono de fax, por favor”)

**Salutation:** Estimado Sr. Gobernador/Dear Governor

Attorney General of Chiapas

Lic. Mariano Herrán Salvatti  
Fiscal General de Justicia del Estado de Chiapas  
Libramiento Norte s/n, tercer nivel, Colonia Infonavit “El Rosario”, CP 30064  
Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico

**Fax:** + 52 961 61 657 24

**Salutation:** Estimado Sr. Fiscal/Dear Attorney General

Director of Human Rights – Interior Ministry

Dr. Ricardo Sepúlveda  
Secretaría de Gobernación,  
Reforma 99, Piso 21, PH, Colonia Tabacalera, CP. 06030, México DF, Mexico

**Fax:** +52 55 51 28 0234 (if someone answers, say “tono de fax, por favor”)

**Salutation:** Estimado Doctor/Dear Dr Sepúlveda

**COPIES TO:**

Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas A.C  
Brasil No. 14 Barrio Mexicanos, CP. 29240, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico

**Fax:** +52 967 67 83551 (if someone answers, say “tono de fax, por favor”)

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 20 March 2006.