

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 41/28/96

UA 156/96

Death threats / Fear for safety

26 June 1996

MEXICO Alfredo Zepeda, aged 54, Jesuit priest, human rights defender
Concepción Hernández Méndez (f), aged 48, lawyer, human rights defender

Over recent weeks, Alfredo Zepeda and Concepción Hernández Méndez have been repeatedly threatened, apparently as a result of their work on behalf of indigenous and peasant rights of Nahuatl, Otomí and Tepehua Indian communities in the Huasteca region of the state of Veracruz. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for their safety.

Alfredo Zepeda and Concepción Hernández Méndez are leading members of the *Agrupación de Derechos Humanos Xochitepetl* and the *Comité de Derechos Humanos de la Sierra Norte de Veracruz* respectively. Both are non-governmental organizations based in Huayacocotla, Veracruz, and are active in the documentation, protection and promotion of human rights in the region.

Some powerful local landowners, known as "caciques", to whom the indigenous population has lost substantial land ownership, have recently stepped up a campaign of intimidation against Alfredo Zepeda and Concepción Hernández Méndez. For example, in May 1996, they falsely accused them in the media of the murder of a local *cacique*, who held important political power in the region, and called for reprisals against the two men.

Although the Roman Catholic bishop of the region made a public statement on 16 May condemning the accusations as false, and supporting human rights work in the region, Alfredo Zepeda and Concepción Hernández Méndez have continued to receive anonymous death threats.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Those campaigning for the human rights of the indigenous population in the Huasteca region have frequently faced threats and even attacks because of their work. Most of the perpetrators have enjoyed impunity.

For example, in late January 1996 José Barrón Rosales, a Nahuatl Indian radio journalist with *Radio Huayacocotla*, survived an attempt on his life, when he was shot at by a gunman because of his work for Indian rights. *Radio Huayacocotla* is closely linked to the *Comité de Derechos Humanos de la Sierra Norte de Veracruz* in their work for human rights promotion. José Barrón's attacker has still not been brought to justice despite being identified by name by several witnesses in complaints lodged with local authorities (see UA 47/96, AMR 41/12/96, 27 February 1996).

The harassment and intimidation of government critics and human rights monitors is one of Amnesty International's main concerns in Mexico at present. 1996 has seen a huge increase in harassment against human rights defenders, most of whom are being targeted for their work on behalf of the community.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French and English or your own language:

- expressing serious concern for the safety of Alfredo Zepeda and Concepción Hernández Méndez, repeatedly threatened because of their human rights work;
- calling for immediate and effective measures to ensure their protection, including a full investigation into the threats in order to bring the perpetrators to justice;

- expressing concern about the apparent impunity benefitting those responsible for threats and attacks against human rights defenders in Mexico (you may cite the case of José Barrón Rosales).

APPEALS TO:

1) President of the Republic
Lic. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León
Presidente de la República
Palacio Nacional, 06067 México D.F., MEXICO
Telegrams: Presidente Zedillo, México D.F., México
Telexes: 170937 sppnme; 1774468 sppnme
Faxes: + 52 5 515 1794 or 542 1648
Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

2) Governor of the State of Veracruz
Lic. Patricio Chirinos Calero
Gobernador del Estado de Veracruz
Palacio de Gobierno
Jalapa, Estado de Veracruz
MEXICO
Telegrams: Gobernador Calero, Jalapa, Veracruz, Mexico
Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Agrupación de Derechos Humanos Xochitepetl
Calle 21 de Marzo
Esq Juárez, Huayacocotla, Veracruz, Mexico
Tel/Fax: +52 775 80345

Comité de Derechos Humanos de la Sierra Norte de Veracruz
Revolución 13
Huayacocotla, Veracruz 92600, Mexico
Tel/Fax: +52 775 80178

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 12 August 1996.