

PUBLIC

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UA 331/04 Fear for safety

MEXICO **Members of Zapotec indigenous communities of Loxicha, Oaxaca State
Members of local indigenous organizations, such as the *Unión de los Pueblos
contra la Represión y la Militarización de la región de Loxicha***

Political activist Leoncio Luna Antonio was shot and killed on 7 November in the Zapotec indigenous community of Santa Cruz, in the Loxicha region of Oaxaca State. He was the fifth Zapotec person killed in political violence in 2004: the state authorities have failed to protect indigenous communities, or bring those responsible for the violence to justice. Opposition political activists, and people working for greater indigenous rights, are in particular danger.

Leoncio Luna Antonio had been campaigning for a coalition of opposition political parties, the *Coalición Todos Somos Oaxaca*. He had reportedly received death threats because of this. His killers are reportedly linked to a local political boss (*cacique*) allied to the governing party in the state, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI).

Indigenous rights campaigner Lino Antonio Almaraz was gunned down on 30 September. He was a member of the local indigenous rights NGO *Unión de los Pueblos contra la Represión y la Militarización en la región de Loxicha* (UPCRMRL), and had been campaigning in the run-up to the local elections, held in October and November. His family have recently reported that gunmen linked to local *caciques* are still in the community, intimidating local people.

Local NGOs are unable to get into indigenous communities in the Loxicha region to document the killings, threats and intimidation now taking place. This has enabled the state authorities to dismiss the political nature of the violence.

The recent elections were carried out according to traditional indigenous practices, but procedural disputes led to the results being postponed. The state authorities have put the Loxicha municipal authority under a temporary unelected administration. This uncertainty has made the already volatile situation still more dangerous.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Loxicha region in Oaxaca has suffered political repression and violence since 1996, when an armed opposition group, the *Ejército Popular Revolucionario* (EPR) emerged in southern Mexico. In the following four years security operations led to scores of Loxicha community members being arrested and tortured, and many were tried on fabricated charges. Since 1996 at least 40 members of the community have been killed in political violence.

The Oaxaca state authorities have consistently failed to impartially protect and guarantee the rights of community, instead favouring factions allied to the PRI. People who have sought to strengthen local indigenous electoral processes against the control of *caciques* have frequently suffered political violence.

Many indigenous communities in Mexico live in extreme poverty with high levels of violence. The authorities in states with sizeable indigenous populations, especially in the south, frequently contribute to these problems, either by actively sponsoring the rule of *caciques* or by failing to effectively address the underlying problems that have led to the marginalization of these communities, such as ensuring access to health, education, transport and land.

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

- expressing concern at the murders of Lino Antonio Almaraz and Leoncio Luna Antonio, and urging the authorities to take immediate steps to ensure the protection of the Zapotec communities of Loxicha;
- calling on them to guarantee the safety of members of organizations such as the UPCRML and others working to promote indigenous rights in the region, so they can carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisal;
- calling for prompt, impartial and full investigations into the murders of Lino Antonio Almaraz and Leoncio Luna Antonio, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Oaxaca

Ulises Ruiz Ortiz
Gobernador del Estado de Oaxaca
Palacio de Gobierno, Bustamante s/n, Oaxaca
Oaxaca 68000 Mexico

Fax: + 52 951 51 637 37

Salutation: Señor Gobernador / Dear Governor

Attorney General of Oaxaca

Lic. Patricia Villanueva Abraján
Procuradora del Estado de Oaxaca
Avenida Luis Echeverría s/n, La Experimental
San Antonio de la Cal, Oaxaca
Oaxaca 71236 Mexico

Fax: +52 951 51 1 5519

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Estimada Procuradora

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, Mexico

Fax: +52 951 51 35185 (if someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")

Salutation: Dear Sir/ Estimado Señor

COPIES TO:

Indigenous rights NGO

Unión de Pueblos contra la represión y militarización de la Región de Loxicha (UPCRMRL)
Calle Armenta y López No. 319, int.2, Oaxaca, México , C.P.68000

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 19 January 2005.