

PUBLIC

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UA 317/08

Fear for safety

MEXICO

**Father Alejandro Solalinde Guerra (m), Catholic priest and migrants' rights worker  
Migrants who witnessed the 5 November kidnapping in Las Anonas, Oaxaca state**

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A group of 11 migrants who witnessed an armed gang kidnapping 12 women migrants in Las Anonas, Oaxaca state, have filed a criminal complaint with the federal authorities for kidnapping, extortion, theft and threats against those responsible. The migrants were aided by Father Alejandro Solalinde Guerra, who is the coordinator of the Catholic Pastoral Care Centre for Migrants in Southwestern Mexico (*Pastoral de Movilidad Humana Pacífico Sur del Episcopado Mexicano*) and director of a migrants' shelter in the municipality of Ixtepec, Oaxaca state. The migrants and Father Alejandro Solalinde are at risk of reprisals by those who carried out the kidnappings.

The incident took place on 5 November, in the locality of Las Anonas, Oaxaca state, where up to 12 migrant women were kidnapped by a group of armed men, some of whom were apparently wearing military fatigues. Some of the women were waiting to board a freight train, one of the principal forms of transport for irregular migrants heading north, while other women were removed directly from the train. Eyewitnesses claim that the train driver was paid by the armed men to stop the train. According to the witnesses' testimony, other migrants present were threatened by the armed gang; and since the incident the gang has tried to locate the witnesses who were staying in shelters in the area.

Father Solalinde has been threatened repeatedly for his public condemnation of the treatment of migrants by both criminal gangs and Mexican officials. On one recent occasion, he was told that his shelter would be burnt down if he did not close it (see UA 191/08, AMR 41/029/2008, 2 July 2008).

In a separate incident, on 10 November, reports indicate that another group of armed men attacked a migrant holding cell (*garita*) in San Pedro Tapanatepec, Oaxaca state, run by the National Migration Institute, part of the federal Interior Ministry. The cell contained about 13 migrants waiting to be transported to the main migrant detention centre in Tapachula, Chiapas state. According to some witnesses, the armed men kidnapped up to eight women. The migration authorities deny that any women were abducted.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Hundreds of thousands of people attempt to travel through Mexico from Central and South America every year to reach the US. Many are detained by the Mexican migration authorities and returned to their countries of origin. Amnesty International recently visited Mexico to investigate reports of human rights violations against these people. They found that many had been kidnapped by gangs, often collaborating with local officials. These gangs and the corrupt officials are almost never brought to justice and people who file complaints against them may face reprisals and fabricated criminal charges. This impunity has allowed abuses against the migrants, who are extremely vulnerable, to increase since about 2003, despite government commitments to ensure respect of migrants' rights. Particularly vulnerable are women and children, who are at heightened risk of rape and trafficking.

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

- calling on the authorities to take appropriate protection measures to guarantee the safety of the 11 witnesses to the 5 November kidnappings so they can testify without fear of reprisals;
- calling on the authorities to take appropriate protection measures to guarantee the safety of Father Alejandro Solalinde so he can continue his work to defend the rights of migrants in his area;
- calling on the authorities to take appropriate protection measures to guarantee the safety of all migrants staying at the shelter *Hermanos en el Camino*, run by Father Alejandro Solalinde in Ixtepec, Oaxaca;
- calling for a prompt and impartial investigation into the kidnappings of migrant women in Las Anonas and from the migrant detention cell in San Pedro Tapanatepec, and ensure those responsible are found and held to account;
- calling on the authorities to take urgent steps to prevent attacks against migrants and migrant rights workers;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 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:**

Attorney General of the Republic

Lic. Eduardo Medina-Mora Icaza

Procuraduría General de la República, Av. Paseo de la Reforma n° 211-213, Piso 16

Col. Cuauhtémoc, Del. Cuauhtémoc, México D.F., C.P. 06500, MEXICO

**Fax: +52 55 53 46 09 08**

**Salutation: Señor Procurador General/Dear Attorney General**

Official with national responsibility for migrants

Lic. Cecilia Romero Castillo, Comisionada del Instituto Nacional de Migración

Calle Homero 1832, Col. Los Morales, Del. Miguel Hidalgo

México D.F., C.P. 11510, MEXICO

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**Salutation: Señora Comisionada/Dear Commissioner**

President of the National Human Rights Commission

Dr. José Luis Soberanes Fernández, Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos

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Col. Tlacopac San Ángel, Del. Álvaro Obregón, México D.F., C.P. 01040, MEXICO

**Fax: +52 55 56 81 81 25 When a recorded voice answers, dial 0**

**Salutation: Señor Presidente/Dear President**

**COPIES TO:**

Padre Alejandro Solalinde Guerra

Casa del Migrante "Hermanos en el Camino"

Av. Ferrocarril Pte no. 60, Barrio de la Soledad, Ciudad Ixtepec, Oaxaca CP 701101, México.

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 30 December 2008.