

URGENT ACTION

ELECTRICITY PROTESTORS FREED IN MEXICO

Three leaders of a protest in Mexico against high electricity bills were released from prison on 6 June, after 11 months. Sara López, Joaquín Aguilar and Guadalupe Borja, were released from the state prison of San Francisco Kobén in Campeche state. Their release occurred after a federal review court rejected the Federal Attorney General's Office challenge to the January 2010 ruling by a federal appeal court that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute them.

Sara López, Joaquín Aguilar and Guadalupe Borja, leading members of an organization campaigning against the high prices charged by the Federal Electricity Company (*Comisión Federal de Electricidad*), the National Movement against High Electricity Tariffs (*Movimiento Nacional contra las Altas Tarifas de Energía Eléctrica*), in the eastern state of Campeche, were arrested in July 2009 after participating in a peaceful protest.

After the protest, the electricity company's lawyer filed a complaint with the Federal Attorney General's Office (PGR) for the minor offence of "obstructing the delivery of a public service" against those named on an electricity company list of debtors for non-payment of bills. On 25 June 2009, the PGR charged the three leaders with the additional serious crime of "illegal deprivation of liberty in the form of hostage-taking" – meaning they could not be freed on bail. Amnesty International declared them to be prisoners of conscience detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

Despite winning their appeal on 6 June, the trial judge responsible for allowing their initial prosecution immediately committed them for trial (*auto de formal prisión*) on new charges for a less serious category of the same crime of kidnapping. This offence is eligible for bail, so the three were released after paying 3000 pesos each and agreeing to sign every other week at the court house. Their defence lawyers are to submit another appeal against the new charge filed.

The Federal Attorney General's Office, which has been responsible for their unfounded prosecution, continues to seek their conviction. Amnesty International believes that these new charges remain part of a campaign of unfounded judicial persecution against three leaders of a protest movement against high electricity charges. Amnesty International will continue to monitor their situation in case they are subject to renewed arbitrary detention and unfair trial.

For the moment no further action is needed from the Urgent Action network. Many thanks to all those who sent appeals.

This is the first update of UA 190/09 (AMR 41/039/2009). Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR41/039/2009/en and <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR41/020/2010/en>

Further information on UA: 190/09 Index: AMR 41/056/2010 Issue Date: 22 July 2010

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