

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 37/014/2004 (Public)  
News Service No: 302  
25 November 2004

### **Honduras: Supreme Court of Justice gives ray of hope to imprisoned indigenous activists**

Published

Amnesty International said today that it considers the indigenous leaders, Leonardo and Marcelino Miranda, to be political prisoners, because the charges against them were politically motivated and they were denied a fair trial.

Leonardo and Marcelino Miranda, leaders of the Lenca indigenous community, in Montaña Verde, Gracias municipality, Lempira department, have been imprisoned since January 2003 when armed police detained and tortured them in front of their relatives and on the way to prison.

"The trial of Leonardo and Marcelino was plagued with irregularities, including a lack of evidence and partiality in relation to the consideration given to witness statements. Only the evidence from the witnesses for the prosecution was taken into account, while the statements made by defence witnesses were ignored," said Amnesty International.

In December 2003, the brothers were sentenced to 25 years imprisonment for the murder of Juan Reyes Gómez in 2001. An appeal lodged on their behalf was rejected in June 2004. A second appeal was lodged with the Honduras Supreme Court of Justice.

On 11 November, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of Leonardo and Marcelino Miranda and against the sentence of 25 years imprisonment for murder. The Court found serious technical problems with the sentence.

"This decision has given a ray of hope in their struggle for justice. However, the Supreme Court has only annulled the sentence and referred the case for consideration by the Santa Rosa de Copán Appeals Court," said Amnesty International.

"It seems that the charges against Marcelino and Leonardo Miranda were not based on any criminal activity on their part. They were only aimed at restricting their attempts to protect the environment and their community's land rights."

For many years, Amnesty International has been concerned about abuses against indigenous

peoples in Honduras and the failure of the authorities to investigate the abuses and bring those responsible to justice. The Miranda brothers were trying to obstruct the efforts of those responsible for abuses and, therefore, ensuring recognition of their community's land rights. Those responsible for abuses are backed by powerful economic and political interests opposed to the brothers' work on behalf of the indigenous communities.

"The failure of the judicial system in Honduras to provide due process to the Miranda brothers and the prison sentence imposed on them has inhibited their ability to carry out their work to protect the human rights of their community. Unless clear and irrefutable evidence is presented against them, it is time that Leonardo and Marcelino Miranda were released to resume that work," concluded Amnesty International.

#### Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>