

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/Ill-treatment/Medical concern

27 November 2000

BOLIVIA

Margarita Terán (f), aged 18, women's union activist

Two police officers have attempted to remove union activist Margarita Terán from prison during the night, in what Amnesty International fears was an attempt to stage her "disappearance". The organization is concerned for her safety.

On 22 November two hooded female police officers reportedly came to San Sebastián women's prison in Cochabamba, where Margarita Terán has been detained since 13 November. They tried to forcibly remove her three times between midnight and four o'clock in the morning, but were prevented from doing so by other prisoners, who threatened to riot if Margarita was taken away.

While in Prison, Margarita Terán has allegedly been kicked, pushed about and verbally abused. She has been made to sleep outdoors, even though she suffers from tuberculosis. On one occasion, she was kept in solitary confinement for a day to prevent her from speaking to journalists.

Margarita Terán is one of the leaders of a women's union, the *Federación Unica de Mujeres "Centrales Unidas" del Trópico de Cochabamba*. She was detained along with fellow activist Leonardo Romero and about twenty others at the beginning of November. All of them were initially released on the condition that they report to the police at a later date. However, when Margarita Terán and Leonardo Romero reported to the police, they were detained, allegedly for masterminding recent blockades of some of the main roads in the El Chapare Region, in which a security force officer and his wife were killed. Leonardo Romero is detained at a different prison.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Police brutality and ill-treatment is widespread in Bolivia, and at least one person died in police custody in 1999. In the El-Chapare region, security forces have committed serious human rights abuses against coca-leaf growers and peasants in an attempt to enforce a government program to eradicate coca-leaf crops.

In April, peasant farmers and other activists blockaded the main roads in the El Chapare region, demanding that the government formulate alternative policies for development, implement agreements made with peasant organizations, demilitarise the area and respect the human rights of coca-leaf farmers. Trying to quell the protest, the security forces used excessive force, reportedly killing ten peasants, including one child, injuring more than 60 people and arbitrarily detaining more than 200 people.

The protesters demonstrated again in September, blockading roads once more. This time, the security forces killed nine peasants. Two security force officers were also killed, and the bodies of four soldiers and one of their wives, who went missing at the time, were found later, showing signs of having been tortured.

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

- urging the authorities to guarantee Margarita Terán's safety, and to ensure that she is not removed from San Sebastián women's prison without the proper procedure;
- expressing concern at reports that she has been ill-treated, and has been made to sleep outdoors even though she suffers from tuberculosis;
- asking that she is not further ill-treated and that she is provided with the necessary medical attention;
- asking the authorities for information on any charges that have been brought against her and Leonardo Romero;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and conclusive investigation into both civilian and military killings during the recent protests, and for the results to be made public and those responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of the Women's Prison of San Sebastián

Sra. Gobernadora de la
Cárcel de San Sebastián,
Mayor Lidia Senzano
Cochabamba, Bolivia

Salutation: Dear Governor / Sra. Gobernadora

Ministry of Government

Sr. Ministro de Gobierno
Guillermo Fortún
Ministerio de Gobierno
Av. Arce esq. Belisario Salinas
La Paz, Bolivia

Fax: + 59 12 442 589

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

Ministry of Justice

Sr. Ministro de Justicia
Luis Vásquez
Ministerio de Justicia
Palacio de Comunicaciones Piso 6,
Avenida Mariscal Santa Cruz
La Paz, Bolivia

Fax: + 59 12 392 982 (If the call is answered, say "Fax, por favor" and wait for the signal)

Salutation: Dear Minister / Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

Non governmental organization

Red Andina de Información
25 de Mayo, entre Jordan y Colama
Edif. Cine Avaroa 3er piso. Casilla 4817
Cochabamba, Bolivia

Fax: + 59 14 252 835

Ombudsperson

Defensora del Pueblo
Ana María Romero de Campero

Calle Heriberto Gutierrez 2374
Casilla 792
La Paz, Bolivia

and to diplomatic representatives of Bolivia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 January 2000.