



On the front line

Regional Action Network on Human Rights Defenders

PERU: Valuable information on human rights violations stolen

The recent change of government in Peru brings with it the hope that the work of human rights defenders will be respected and supported. The transition government of Valentín Paniagua, who took office on 22 November, will be expected to put an end to the recent series of acts of intimidation against human rights organizations in Peru.

On 4 November 2000, weeks prior to President Fujimori being declared morally unfit to rule the country, a group of armed men broke into the

Lima office of *Paz y Esperanza*, Peace and Hope. One of them held a security guard at gunpoint for three hours. The men stole hard disks and a computer containing important information about alleged human rights violations, leaving behind other expensive equipment like fax machines and

is assisting people who have been tortured by members of the security forces to get redress from the courts, and ensuring that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

The break-ins are believed to be the work of people linked to the recently disestablished *Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional (SIN)*, National Intelligence Service, and were intended to intimidate and silence those who have filed complaints against them.

The umbrella organization *Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDDHH)*, National Coordinator of Human Rights, which represents 61 human rights groups, among them COMISEDH and Paz y Esperanza, recently filed a criminal complaint accusing Vladimiro Montesinos, who was de facto head of the SIN during the Fujimori regime, and others of "disappearances", torture and homicide. The complaint alleges that Vladimiro Montesinos and others were involved in the 1991 Barrios Altos massacre in which 15 people were killed, in the abduction and murder of a professor and nine students of La Cantuta University in 1992 and in other serious human rights violations. A warrant for Montesinos' arrest has been issued.

In addition, in December the CNDDHH filed a criminal complaint before the Public Ministry against ex-President Alberto Fujimori for his alleged

Human rights defenders in the "Marcha de los 4 Suyos" (see overleaf) ©CNDDHH

printers.

The office of the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos (COMISEDH)*, Human Rights Commission had been broken into three days earlier. Again, the burglars took computers and disks, ignoring other valuable equipment. The disks contained information on human rights violations, including information for a forthcoming publication on "disappearances" and impunity.

Previously, on 23 October 2000, unknown people had broken into COMISEDH's office in the Ayacucho City, Ayacucho Department. Among their other areas of work, COMISEDH

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involvement in the 1991 Barrios Altos massacre.

In the days before Alberto Fujimori was sworn in for the third time as President on 28 July 2000, a series of protests called "los 4 Suyos" (the four regions of the Inca empire), took place in Lima. The massive mobilization of peasants, students, trade unionists, human rights defenders and other sectors of civil society called for a strengthening of democracy in Peru. The CNDDHH brought together over 300 activists from all over Peru to observe the protests and record any human rights violations.

Wearing yellow jackets identifying themselves as monitors, human rights defenders equipped with cameras and mobile telephones, accompanied the demonstration and registered and recorded numerous complaints and accusations from all parts of Peru. Some of those who wanted to participate in the demonstrations faced obstacles, and in some cases, were prevented from participating by members of the National Police. They received many complaints of keeping back buses, withholding documents and also individual detentions.

On the third day of the demonstrations violence erupted. Some reported that the violence had been started by infiltrators. After the violence had erupted the CNDDHH registered over 100 detentions and numerous cases of injury.

During the second half of the 1990s threats, harassment and intimidation of journalists, human rights defenders and leaders of the opposition increased in Peru. Intimidation varies from anonymous death threats, to false accusations of "terrorism-related offences", to intimidation against journalists, in particular through the filing of law suits for tax evasion. It is widely claimed that the National Intelligence Service has been behind this harassment.

It is vital, now, that the transition government, and any subsequent government that takes over on 28 July 2001, send a clear signal that intimidation of human rights defenders will not be tolerated and ensure that human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisal.

(For further information see UA 344/00 AMR 46/36/00, UA 64/00 AMR 46/26/00.)

Hina Jilani appointed UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders

On 18 August 2000, the Secretary General's office announced the appointment of Ms. Hina Jilani as the new Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders.

Hina Jilani ©Private

Ms. Jilani is a practising lawyer in Lahore, Pakistan, specialising in human rights issues. In 1980, she founded the first women's law firm in

Pakistan. She also served as an expert to United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The Special Representative will base her mandate within the framework of the UN *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* and study patterns of violations against human rights defenders in order to focus on individual allegations. She intends to take on cases of violations committed against individuals as well as groups of human rights defenders.

In the last few months, the Special Representative has worked on defining the normative and substantial framework of her mandate. She has attended several NGO consultations in New York and Geneva to discuss the scope and methods of work. She also met with Third Committee Delegations during an informal dialogue held during the General Assembly Session in New York on 31 October 2000.

During the course of the last few months, the Special Representative has already received a large number of complaints and allegations related to her mandate and has begun to raise some of them with the governments concerned through urgent appeals and letters.

The Special Representative is also preparing her first report which she will present to the next session of the Commission on Human Rights in March 2001. In this report she will set out the normative and juridical framework of her mandate, state her priorities and issues of concern, as well as report about initial activities.

In the coming months, in addition to communications sent to governments, the Special Representative will undertake more in-depth research on the patterns of violations and on legislation affecting the promotion and protection of human rights, in order to elaborate recommendations and articulate effective strategies to protect human rights defenders.

However, the Special Representative has already adopted a number of methods, particularly letters, urgent appeals and press releases as a key form of communication with governments concerned. These communications are drafted on the basis of information received from a vast network of both local and international sources.

Country-visits and field missions will be an integral part of the Special Representative's work. She still hasn't planned any visits, but hopes to be able to travel in the coming year. The potential host candidates for the Special Representative's first mission are to remain confidential for the time being.

In order to carry out this work, Ms. Jilani, who is based in Lahore (Pakistan), will be assisted by a human rights officer at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. Her assistant in Geneva will provide support with the substantial aspects of her mandate, such as analysis of complaints and allegations, drafting of communications and reports and preparation of fact-finding missions.

Ms. Jilani can be contacted through her assistant at OHCHR in Geneva:

UNOG-OHCHR
Palais Wilson
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Fax: 41 22 917 90 06

Launching of a Human Rights Defenders Office of the International Service for Human Rights in Geneva

In the wake of the appointment of a Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders in October 2000 the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) opened up a Human Rights Defenders Office in Geneva. The main purpose of the office is to train human rights defenders.

The office will provide:

- Advice on and facilitating access to the use and development of international human rights mechanisms that protect the rights of human rights defenders. This would include assisting contacts between defenders, the UN Special Representative, NGOs (international and national), diplomats (in Geneva and New York) and UN Staff.
- Practical information that can enhance the protection of human rights defenders, such as manuals on preventative and emergency measures, universal and regional standards and procedures.
- Analytical studies on issues related to the protection of defenders, for example on national legislation and the implications of articles of the UN *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*.
- Seminars to enable human rights defenders to analyse collectively risks and obstacles they face in their work. This will include regional seminars, held in co-operation with partner NGOs, which will also enable human rights defenders to meet with UN and Regional Representatives.

For further information contact:

Mark Thompson, Project Director,
Human Rights Defenders Office
c/o International Service for Human Rights
P.O. Box 16
1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 733 0826
Tel: +41 22 733 5123

Protecting the human rights of parliamentarians

Parliamentarians are in an uncommon situation: their functions give them a key role in the development, promotion and protection of human rights, but their position on the political stage, as well as their activities to defend the rights and freedoms of those whom they represent, can expose them to violations of their own rights both as individuals, in common with their constituents, and as parliamentarians. As the world organization of national parliaments, which includes among its objectives the promotion and defence of human rights, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has always been concerned with the fate of parliamentarians subjected to arbitrary measures and in 1976, it set up a specific human rights complaints procedure.

The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

Under this procedure, the IPU established a Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians entrusting it with the task of examining complaints of human rights violations of parliamentarians.

The procedure extends to members of national parliaments “*who are or have been subjected to arbitrary actions during the exercise of the mandate entrusted to them*”. The Committee is composed of five parliamentarians representing the world’s main geopolitical regions. It meets *in camera* four times a year to adopt decisions on the cases which have been referred to it, taking into account relevant national and international human rights law.

Specific features of the procedure before the Committee

The initial confidential nature of the proceedings allows the Committee to work independently of any external pressure. However, it can decide to go public by bringing a case to the attention of the Council, the plenary policy-making body of the IPU. At this stage the support of the international parliamentary community, often transcending partisan considerations and national and cultural divides, can be brought to bear in seeking a satisfactory settlement of a case. On many occasions, this parliamentary solidarity has indeed helped the IPU and its Human Rights Committee to secure the release of a fellow parliamentarian or otherwise obtain that arbitrary actions cease.

The consideration of a case does not end once the Committee has issued its findings, but continues until a satisfactory settlement is reached. Lastly, the Committee's procedure provides for quick intervention in urgent cases and enables it, through on-site missions and hearings, not only to gather first hand information, but also to share its concerns directly with the competent authorities and thus put additional pressure on them to find an appropriate solution.

Who can submit a complaint

In addition to the victim - or a person

authorized by the victim – family members, any other parliamentarian as well as human rights organisations in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, can submit complaints and have regularly done so in the past. Moreover, the Committee can unanimously decide to accept other sources of information. The Committee is not competent to take up a case of its own accord but can only act upon receiving a communication. Such a complaint should be complete, accurate and concise and, once local remedies have been exhausted, be addressed to:

Mr. Anders B. Johnsson
Secretary General
Inter-Parliamentary Union
Place du Petit-Saconnex
Case postale 438
CH 1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
fax: (41 22) 919 41 60

More information about the IPU’s work in the field of human rights and in particular about its Human Rights Committee may be found at the Organization’s Website <http://www.ipu.org>. The site also contains the resolutions on individual human rights cases adopted by the IPU Council. These resolutions concern at present 133 MPs in 16 countries in all regions of the world.

Medellín: Colombian Government again fails to protect human rights defenders

As Colombia’s second city, Medellín is a centre where many economic and political interests converge.

Medellín is also home to a wide variety of non-governmental organizations, working to defend and promote human rights not only in the conflictive shanty-town neighbourhoods of the city but also in Colombia’s biggest department, Antioquia. Many of these organizations are currently reeling from a recent series of attacks that show the appalling risks that Colombian human rights defenders face in the course of their day-to-day work.

When Angel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve finished work at the *Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (ASFADDES)*, Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared, on 6 October 2000, they went out to a restaurant with five others from the office.

Angel José Quintero Mesa
©ASFADDES
(see appeals cases)

They went on to a bar, and when Claudia left, Angel said he would walk to the bus stop with her. Neither of them arrived at their destination. Witnesses say they were abducted by two gunmen on a motorcycle and a group of men in a pick-up truck.

*Claudia Monsalve ©ASFADDES
(see appeals cases)*

For some time Angel Quintero had faced continuous threats and harassment as a result of his work with ASFADDES on the "disappearance" of three of his wife's relatives in August this year, and previous "disappearances" of other members of his wife's family. In the light of these events thousands of concerned individuals from around the world expressed their concern for Angel's safety, alerting the Colombian authorities to the danger he was facing. It seems these warnings went unheeded. Claudia Monsalve had been working with ASFADDES to find out what happened to her brother, a university student who "disappeared" in 1995. Judicial investigations have led to a number of police officers being implicated in his abduction. Since Angel and Claudia's "disappearance" several members of ASFADDES in Medellín have received threatening telephone calls.

ASFADDES members are no strangers

to intimidation and harassment by those determined to block and obstruct their search for justice. While those in Medellín have been particularly targeted, this year members of ASFADDES branches in Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Barrancabermeja and Popayán have also been threatened. Many have had to leave their home towns in fear of their lives. In August 2000, on the International Day of the "Disappeared", 15 Latin American associations of relatives of the detained-disappeared wrote an open letter to President Pastrana expressing their outrage at attacks during the first six months of 2000 against several members of ASFADDES.

On the morning of 9 October 2000, three telephone calls were made to the *Instituto Popular de Capacitación (IPC)*, Popular Training Institute, in Medellín, declaring Nelson Restrepo, Ignacio Arango, Juan Carlos Muñoz, Fredy Vélez and Wilfer Bonilla to be "military targets". The callers identified themselves as members of the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC)*, United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia.

The IPC is a long-established and internationally respected non-governmental human rights organization specializing in research, popular education and peace promotion. Nelson Restrepo, Ignacio Arango, Juan Carlos Muñoz and Fredy Vélez work on the IPC human rights programme. Wilfer Bonilla worked on the IPC youth programme until September. As a result of these threats several IPC workers have left Medellín.

The IPC has previously been targeted by paramilitaries. In August 1999, a bomb exploded outside the IPC office, causing serious damage to it and surrounding buildings. The bomb attack came only days after AUC leaders were formally charged with the

abduction of four IPC workers in January 1999.

These attacks are indications of a systematic campaign to prevent human rights work in Medellín. As is often the case in Colombia, the attacks have been paralleled by subtle attempts to discredit the work of human rights defenders in the mass media. On 14 September 2000, *El Mundo*, a local newspaper circulating primarily in Medellín and Antioquia, published an editorial which criticised the condemnation by human rights groups of an incident in which six school children were killed and four were injured by the Colombian soldiers who allegedly mistook the school children for subversives. The editorial, claiming that non-governmental organizations are 'of the extreme left' and 'close to the guerrilla', falsely accused them of manipulating the incident and creating a hate campaign against the army. It also contrived that the human rights groups are the 'real violators of human rights'.

Several Medellín based human rights organizations responded to the editorial to ask for a rectification of information.

These latest attacks not only bring into sharp relief, yet again, the systematic and ongoing campaign of repression against those who defend human rights in Colombia, but also raise the question of just how serious the government is when it claims to value and respect the work of the human rights movement. How many more human rights activists will be killed, "disappeared" or forced into exile before the authorities take concrete longterm action to prevent these attacks?

APPEALS CASES

Argentina: Threats and harassment against human rights lawyers

A group of lawyers in Mendoza province representing the families of victims in two important human rights cases have been intimidated and harassed, and their offices have been broken into. The police are suspected of complicity, and the lawyers are believed to be in serious danger.

On 24 October the Mendoza office was broken into and paper and electronic files were stolen. Files relating to two cases involving police officers were rifled through. Anonymous callers later telephoned the lawyers and told them that two ex-police officers linked to the Mendoza Investigations Police (*Dirección de Investigaciones de la Policía*) were

year-old student who went missing in 1997 after he was left in the care of police officers while on a school trip.

The lawyers are representing the Bordón family, who have also been threatened since the trial began. On 14 December 2000, sentences raging between 15 and two years imprisonment were handed down against five members of the police for their involvement in the ill-treatment and killing of Sebastian Bordon.

In June false claims about the lawyers were distributed to the press, apparently because they had taken up the case of José Segundo Zambrano and Pablo Rodríguez, who "disappeared" in March, reportedly after they went to meet a Mendoza police officer.

Diego Lavado ©AI

Two days later local radio and television carried false reports that one of the lawyers, Diego Lavado, had been arrested thereby insinuating that the lawyer was implicated in the crime. The bodies of José Segundo Zambrano and Pablo Rodríguez were found in July, and judicial investigations into their killings are now underway.

The Mendoza Ministry of Justice and Security has previously assured Amnesty International in various letters since July 2000 that the lawyers

will have all the guarantees their profession merits and has expressed respect for their work.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

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

- expressing concern about the harassment and intimidation of human rights lawyers Carlos Varela, Diego Lavado, Alejandro Acosta and three of their colleagues have, and that their offices have been broken into, seemingly because of their legitimate legal work;
- expressing the hope that reassurance given by the provincial authorities in Mendoza of the Ministry of Justice and Security will mean the effective end of such harassment;
- renew your call for a full and impartial investigation into the break-in on 24 October in Mendoza with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice and ask for information regarding the progress of any investigation already underway on this case.
- urging the Argentine government to adhere to the principles of the UN *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* adopted on 9 December 1998, and to implement resolutions by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States AG/RES. 1671 (XXIX-O/99) on 7 June 1999 and AG/RES, 1711 (XXX-O/00) on 5 June 2000.

Carlos Varela ©AI

responsible for the break-in.

In August this year the human rights lawyers received three anonymous telephone calls as seven police officers and two civilians went on trial charged with involvement in the killing of Sebastián Bordón, an 18-

APPEALS TO:**Provincial Authorities****Minister of Justice**

Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad de la
Provincia de Mendoza
Dr. Leopoldo Manuel Orquín
Salta 672, Godoy Cruz, 5501 Mendoza,
Argentina

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear
Minister

Fax: + 54 261 449 9083

Governor Mendoza Province

Sr. Gobernador de la Provincia de
Mendoza

Sr. Roberto Iglesias

Casa de Gobierno, 5500 Mendoza,
Mendoza, Argentina

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear
Governor

Fax: + 54 261 449 2142 or

+ 54 261 449 2143

National authorities**Minister of Justice and Human Rights**

Sr. Ministro de Justicia y Derechos
Humanos

Dr. Jorge de la Rúa,

Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos
Humanos

Sarmiento 329, 5o. Piso, 1041 Buenos
Aires, Argentina

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear
Minister

Fax: + 54 11 4328 5395

COPIES TO:**Lawyers Association**

Federacion Argentina de Colegios de
Abogados

Avenida de Mayo 651, 2º piso, Buenos
Aires, Argentina

Colombia: Threats against Association of Relatives of Detained Disappeared

Since two human rights defenders and members of the *Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (ASFADDES)*, Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared, were abducted and "disappeared" in the department of Antioquia two months ago, other ASFADDES members in different parts of the country have been threatened repeatedly.

Four families who belong to the Medellín branch of ASFADDES were forced to leave the region after they received a number of threatening telephone calls on 8 and 9 October, only days after Angel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve were abducted by unidentified gunmen after leaving work at the ASFADDES office.

On 31 October, workers at the Medellín ASFADDES office received a telephone call in which a woman could be heard crying and calling for help, as if she were being tortured, before a man ordered her to hang up. Pancho Castro, a human rights defender who works with ASFADDES, has received two written death threats telling him: "Communist son of a bitch we know where you are..." and "Antipatriotic hypocrites will be eliminated". On 13 November, someone called the ASFADDES office and said: "Die, die, die, you are going to die".

Other members of ASFADDES working in Bucaramanga, Barrancabermeja and Popayán have also recently received threatening telephone calls.

The whereabouts of Angel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve remain

unknown. There has also been no news of Angel Quintero's relatives, Ruben Usuga Higueta, Wilson Usuga Higueta and Arvey Poso Usuga, who "disappeared" in August 2000.

ASFADDES is a national non-governmental human rights organization made up of families of the "disappeared", who work to find out the fate and whereabouts of their relatives and to bring those responsible to justice.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

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

- repeating your concern for the safety of ASFADDES members Angel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve, who have not been seen since 6 October, and urging the authorities to intensify the search for them;
- urging that full and impartial investigations are undertaken into their "disappearance", with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- stating that so far government efforts to protect human rights defenders are insufficient to cope with the magnitude of their security situation;
- urging the authorities to intensify efforts to protect members of ASFADDES;
- stating that protection measures such as reinforcements for offices, must be accompanied by stronger measures such as proper investigations, if the Colombian government is serious about its international human rights obligations.

APPEALS TO:President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana
Arango
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No.7-26
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Telegrams: President Pastrana,
Bogota, Colombia
Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/287 7939/ 284
2186/289 3377
Salutation: Dear President/ Excmo. Sr
Presidente

Vice-President of the Republic

Señor Vicepresidente Gustavo Bell
Lemus
Alto Consejero Presidencial para
asuntos de Derechos Humanos y
lucha Contra la Corrupción
Cra. 8 #7-26,
Palacio de Nariño,
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia
Faxes: + 57 1 337 1351
Salutation: Dear Vice-President /
Excmo. Sr. Vicepresidente

Governor of the Department of
Antioquia

Sr. Guillermo Gaviria Correa
Gobernador del Departamento de
Antioquia
Gobernación de Antioquia, Calle 42B,
52-106,
Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia
Telegrams: Gobernador de
Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia
Faxes: + 57 4 381 1342 Salutation:
Dear Governor/ Sr. Gobernador

Medellín Metropolitan Police
Commander

Brigadier General Luis Alfredo
Rodríguez Pérez
Comandante de la Policía
Metropolitana
Carrera 48, # 45-58
Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia
Faxes: + 57 4 251 8959-8732
Salutation: Dear Police Commander/
Sr. Comandante

COPIES TO:Association for Relatives of the

"Disappeared"
ASFADDES
AA 011446
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

NOTICE BOARD**E I S a l v a d o r :
Protection for human
rights defenders as a
result of international
pressure**

William Hernández, the executive director of "Entre Amigos", *Asociación Salvadoreña de Desarrollo Integral para Minorías Sexuales*, "Between Friends", Salvadorean Integral Development Association for Sexual Minorities, in San Salvador, received a number of telephone death threats on 5 November 1999. The caller apparently rang the office of *Entre Amigos* three times asking to speak to him and threatening to come to the office to kill him. Previously on 7 March 1999 he had also received a death threat.

William Hernández ©AI

As a result of international pressure on his case the police finally offered protection to William Hernández in late February 2000, when international appeals on his behalf were at their peak.

William Hernández has offered his heartfelt thanks to all those who sent appeals, and said: "there is no doubt that without this pressure they would not have given us police protection".

Entre Amigos have reported several cases of intimidation of and violence against sexual minorities and those involved with the work of the organization.

In August 1999, members of the National Civilian Police beat and insulted six homosexuals, threatening them with death. Several members of sexual minorities were also reportedly killed last year.

When the authorities feigned ignorance of his case, William replied that he had copies of all the letters (a total of 468 letters and 858 e-mails) which had been sent to them.

Foreign embassies also put pressure on the authorities writing repeatedly to ask what action they were taking.

While the authorities are starting to investigate some cases involving sexual minorities, impunity and discrimination are still the norm for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and activists who work with these people.

Entre Amigos is one of several non-governmental organizations whose telephones have been tapped, according to an *exposé* in the Salvadorean newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* in August this year of widespread bugging in El Salvador. In February 2000, *Entre Amigos* reported this to the head of police, followed by an official complaint against the telephone company. An investigation is pending.

UNESCO: Bishop Samuel Ruiz García from Mexico awarded the International Simón Bolívar Prize

On 23 October, UNESCO Director General Koïchiro Matsuura presented the 2000 International Simón Bolívar

Prize to Samuel Ruiz García, the former bishop of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, at a ceremony in Paris. The prize is awarded every two years in recognition of activity of outstanding merit which has contributed to the freedom, independence and dignity of peoples, as well as to the strengthening of solidarity between nations.

From 1959 to 1999 Samuel Ruiz García served as bishop of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, a diocese of extreme poverty and a majority indigenous population. Around 44,000 indigenous refugees received assistance from his diocese over more than 10 years. In response to his role in seeking a peaceful solution to the appalling human rights situation in the region, Ruiz himself and members of his family have received several death threats. He also served as mediator in the conflict in Guatemala, and was the instigator of the *Comisión Nacional de Intermediación (CONAI)*, National Mediation Commission in Mexico.

In his acceptance speech, Samuel Ruiz García emphasised that through him, the ethnic communities of Chiapas, Mexico, and the American continent, and all the other indigenous peoples of the world, had been awarded this prize: "It is their struggles, their sufferings, their hopes and aspirations that must be recognized".

Samuel Ruiz García said he felt sad "knowing how much repression, how much pain is involved in the struggle of indigenous peoples".

Samuel Ruiz García ©AI

Prize to Samuel Ruiz García, the former bishop of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, at a ceremony in Paris.

The US\$25,000 UNESCO Prize is awarded every two years in recognition of activity of outstanding merit which has contributed to the freedom, independence and dignity of peoples, as well as to the strengthening of solidarity between nations.

Mr. Matsuura evoked Samuel Ruiz García's long struggle for social justice as Bishop of Chiapas: "You have devoted yourself whole-heartedly to the well-being of the people of Chiapas and to the defence of their culture, whilst engaging yourself fully, both as a humanitarian leader and as a political mediator respected by all sides, to helping relieve the suffering caused by the many conflicts that have flared up in this region where Mexico and Central America converge [...]. At

M e x i c o : Environmentalist prisoners of conscience thank human rights groups for support

Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera, two environmentalist prisoners of conscience, have written a letter thanking those who have supported them, including national and international human rights organizations.

"From the Regional Prison of Iguala, Guerrero state, we would like to greet all our friends, of all ages, from all around the world. We would like to send our sincere and loving greetings to the civil and religious organizations, as well as to the environmental organizations and the political parties that fight for democracy and love and respect for others, to the media, human rights organizations, like Miguel Agustín Pro, and other national and local ones; and to our families, we would like to thank them for the great support that they have given us and we hope that they keep up their spirits and that we can increase our efforts to protect all forms of life. (...).

Dear friends, we must not exchange the future of our children for a few coins. Let's be united, hand in hand with this new world that is for all of us. Dear family, we repeat our commitment from behind bars. This is not goodbye, but see you soon. With courage, good luck and faith anything can be achieved.

Sincerely,

*The environmentalist peasant farmers
of the Mountains of Petatlán and
Coyuca de Catalán.*

*Rodolfo Montiel Flores
Teodoro Cabrera García*

The two environmental activists were detained and falsely charged, solely because of their peaceful protest against excessive logging in the Petatlán mountains of Guerrero state.

Both men were taken into custody by the military in May 1999. They were held incomunicado and tortured in order to force them to sign self-incriminating statements. Prison staff continued to harass and intimidate them while they were in detention awaiting trial. In August 2000, they were sentenced to respectively six years and eight months, and 10 years imprisonment.

This publication is produced by the Program to Promote the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Latin America, established by Amnesty International in May 1997 to follow-up the Defenders Conference (Bogotá, Colombia, May 1996). Please distribute this bulletin as widely as possible. For more information and to join the Program's Defenders Network, write to:

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International Secretariat, Amnesty International,
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