

Public

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To: Health professional members
From: Medical team / Americas program
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MEDICAL ACTION

Ill-health of Francisco Cortés, peasant leader

BOLIVIA

Key words ill-health / access to healthcare

Amnesty International's concerns

Amnesty International is concerned about the poor health of Francisco Cortés, a peasant leader of Colombian nationality, currently being held at the maximum security prison *Penitenciaría de San Pedro de Chochocoro* on the outskirts of La Paz. Public statements made by Francisco Cortés' lawyer indicate that he is suffering from hepatitis, headaches, serious sight problems and constant nosebleeds. Amnesty International is seeking further information about his condition.

There is no information indicating that he has received adequate medical attention for his health problems but Amnesty International has had long-standing concerns about the serious inadequacy of health care in Bolivian prisons (see *Bolivia: Torture and Ill-Treatment: Amnesty International's Concerns*, AMR 18/008/2001; <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR180082001>). Amnesty International is calling for a proper medical investigation and diagnosis of the health problems of Francisco Cortés, and for him to be given appropriate treatment.

Background information

Francisco Cortés was arrested on 10 April 2003 on charges of terrorism, drug-trafficking and espionage. The Bolivian government has accused him of being a member of the Colombian armed opposition group ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* – National Liberation Army) and of trying to establish such a group in Bolivia.

Francisco Cortés is a peasant leader and executive member of the non-governmental organization National Association of Peasant Land Users (*Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* - ANUC) in Colombia. He has been included in the Colombian Interior Ministry's Witness Protection Program for Threatened Persons since 1999 following the receipt of death threats due to his legitimate work as a peasant leader. He and his family have been forced to continually move residence for their personal safety.

Francisco Cortés had been invited to La Paz by members of the Bolivian coca-growing peasant movement as part of initiatives for exchanging experiences between peasant organizations in the Andean region. He was arrested along with three Bolivian nationals, who

are also still currently detained. They are Claudio Ramírez, a Bolivian peasant leader and owner of the house where Francisco Cortés was arrested; his daughter Nelly Ramírez, a radio announcer; and Carmelo Peñaranda, coca leaf farmer and union leader.

Right to health

The Bolivian Constitution and international human rights law guarantee the right to health and to life. Article 7(a) of Bolivia's Constitution guarantees the right to health and safety and to life. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guarantees the right to health (at article 12) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states in article 6 that "every human being has the inherent right to life".

In addition, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, in discussing provision of health care, state in article 22 (2) that: "Sick prisoners who require specialist medical treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals".

Recommendations

Please write letters, preferably in Spanish, or in English to the authorities below, using professionally-headed paper if you use this in your profession:

- introducing yourself in your professional capacity and/or as a member of Amnesty International concerned with human rights and health;
- expressing concern at reports that Francisco Cortés, held in a maximum security prison in La Paz, is suffering from hepatitis, headaches, serious sight problems and constant nosebleeds;
- urging the authorities to ensure that he is provided with a proper diagnosis of his medical problems and given appropriate medical care;
- urging the authorities to immediately provide information on the state of health of, and medical assistance provided to, Francisco Cortés.

Addresses

President

Sr. Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada
Palacio de Gobierno
Plaza Murillo s/n
La Paz, Bolivia
Fax: + 591 22 2 04 213
Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente de la República

Minister of the Presidency, Justice and Human Rights

Sr. José Guillermo Justiniano
Ministerio de la Presidencia, Justicia y Derechos Humanos
Palacio de Gobierno
Plaza Murillo s/n
La Paz, Bolivia
Fax: + 591 22 203588
Salutation: Sr Ministro de la Presidencia, de Justicia y Derechos Humanos

Minister of Health

Sr. Javier Torres Goitia
Ministerio de Salud
Plaza del Estudiante esq. Cañada Strongest
La Paz, Bolivia
Fax: + 591 22 391 590/081167812
Salutation: Sr. Ministro de Previsión Social y Salud Pública

Director General of Prisons

Sr. Director General
Jorge Daniel Ayllón Zamorano
Ministerio de Gobierno
Dirección General de
Régimen Penitenciario
Av. Arce esq. Belisario Salinas
La Paz, Bolivia
Salutation: Director General de Régimen Penitenciario

Copies of appeals

Please send copies of your appeals to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Bolivia:

Sr. Carlos Saavedra Bruno
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto
Plaza Murillo
c Ingavi esq. Junín
La Paz, Bolivia .
fax + 591 22 4 08 405 or replace last three digits with 642 or 905 or 934
Salutation: Sr. Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto

and to diplomatic representatives of Bolivia accredited to your country.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within six weeks of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response, referring to your previous letter(s). Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 2003, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Monitoring of actions

If you have access to e-mail you can help our attempt to monitor letter writing actions. If you write one, two or more letters please send us an e-mail and let us know. Please write in the subject line of your e-mail the index number of the action and the number of letters you write e.g. AMR 18/008/2003 – 2. Please also let us know about any other activity undertaken by your group/network and e-mail us at medical@amnesty.org Thank you