

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 28/015/2005

11 July 2005

UA 184/05 Fear for safety

ECUADOR **María Teresa Cherres Mesías (f), community leader in Condor village, Orellana province**
Other community leaders in Orellana province

María Teresa Cherres Mesías, a community leader from Condor village in Orellana province, in the northern Amazon region of Ecuador, has been threatened and intimidated. The threats appear to be linked to her criticism of an oil company operating in the region, and her defence of the labour rights of oil company workers and of the communities in Orellana where the company operates. Her life and the lives of other community leaders may be in danger.

On 24 May, María Teresa Cherres Mesías was one of several community leaders from Condor and the surrounding area who had organised a demonstration to demand the Ecuadorean authorities invest more in the infrastructure of communities where the oil company operates. A group of men reportedly asked some of those taking part about who had organised the demonstration. One of the men, who was apparently accompanied by a group of military personnel, allegedly approached María Teresa Cherres Mesías and said, "*Ojalá que nunca me la encuentre sola*" ("I hope we never meet when you are on your own"). She filed a complaint before the Public Prosecutor in the provincial capital, Coca, on 31 May. However, as far as Amnesty International is aware, no investigation has been initiated into the threat.

On 30 June, she was reportedly followed by a man whom she believes works for an oil company which is operating in the region. The man was seen following her as she conducted a workshop on human rights education, which was attended by community leaders from around Orellana province. In October 2004 María Teresa Cherres Mesías reported to local non-governmental organizations that the same man had followed her on a number of occasions, and had asked others about her whereabouts. Amnesty International is not aware of any action that has been taken by the authorities to ensure that María Teresa Cherres Mesías is able to continue her activities without fear of reprisals.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the last few years, Amnesty International has received several reports of threats, death threats and other intimidation of human rights defenders, non-governmental organizations, and communities and their leaders, who oppose the government's oil extraction policies (For more information, see UA 147/05, AMR 28/13/2005, 1 June 2005; UA 75/04, AMR 28/005/2004, 20 February 2004 and follow-ups; UA 156/04, AMR 28/014/2004, 26 April 2004; UA 36/04, 28/002/2004, 3 February 2004) Amnesty International has called upon the authorities to investigate these threats and bring those responsible to justice, but to date nobody has been charged.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of María Teresa Cherres Mesías and other community leaders in the village of Condor, Orellana province;
- expressing concern that María Teresa Cherres Mesías was threatened and intimidated, apparently in connection with her work on behalf of communities affected by the activities of oil companies;
- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of María Teresa Cherres Mesías and other community leaders in Condor, according to the wishes of those who need protection;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the intimidation of María Teresa Cherres Mesías, for the results to be made public and for those found responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:Minister of the Interior

Dr. Mauricio Gándara Gallegos
Ministro de Gobierno, Policía,
Justicia, Cultos y Municipalidades
Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía
Benalcázar y Espejo
Quito, Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 258 1030 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Minister/Sñor Ministro

Acting Attorney General

Dra. Cecilia Armas Tobar
Ministra Fiscal Subrogante
Fiscalía General del Estado
Av. Eloy Alfaro N°32-240 y República
Quito, Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 255 8561 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Acting Attorney General/Sra. Ministra Fiscal Subrogante

COPIES TO:Human Rights Organization

Comisión Ecuménica de Derechos Humanos (CEDHU)
Carlos Ibarra 176 y 10 de Agosto
Edif. Yuraj Pirca, 9no. piso, Quito, Ecuador

Fax: + 593 2 258 9272 (If someone answers say: 'tono de fax, por favor')

and to diplomatic representatives of Ecuador accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 August 2005.