

EXTERNAL

AI Index: 45/02/97

UA 227/97 Fear for Safety/Possible Extrajudicial Execution 22 July 1997

PARAGUAY Epifanio CANTERO, peasant leader/land rights campaigner

Killed: Felipe Pablo BENÍTEZ.

Epifanio Cantero, a member of the *Comisión Vecinal de Puente Kué*, (CVPK) Puente Kué Neighbourhood Commission, which is campaigning for land rights for landless peasant farmers in the municipality of Yuty, department of Caazapá, has recently received a number of anonymous death threats. Concern for his safety is heightened by the fact that another member of the Commission, Felipe Pablo Benítez, was killed on 11 July 1997 by unidentified gunmen, subsequent to him also receiving death threats.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For the past two months members of the Puente Kué Neighbourhood Commission have been camped in the entrance to the *Catedral Metropolitana*, Metropolitan Cathedral in the capital Asunción, as part of a campaign to secure the rights to 1,800 hectares of under-used land belonging to the *Firma Ganadera Caapucumí*, Caapucumí Cattle-Ranching Company.

Human rights violations relating to land disputes are reported to be on the increase in Paraguay as the fight continues by landless peasant farmers to occupy large tracts of under-developed or under-used property owned by large and powerful landowners. There is strong evidence that landowners have hired armed civilians and that they have been responsible for the deaths of at least four peasant leaders killed in Paraguay in the last 12 months. These landowners are said to operate with the acquiescence of the security forces.

There have also been violent expulsions and ill-treatment or torture of landless peasant farmers by the police. On 7 May members of the San Pedro Police Department were reported to have brutally beaten peasant farmers occupying land in the Costa Nueva settlement, *25 de Diciembre Community*, San Pedro department, during an eviction operation.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Epifanio Cantero, a peasant leader from the Puente Kué Neighbourhood Commission, in Yuty, Caazapá Department, who has reportedly received death threats in recent months;
- expressing concern at the killing of Felipe Pablo Benítez, another member of the CVPK, on 11 July.
- urging the authorities to undertake full and impartial investigations into the death threats against Epifanio Cantero and the killing of Felipe Pablo Benítez, that the results be made public and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- urging that all measures are taken to guarantee the safety of Epifanio Cantero and other members of the CVPK.

APPEALS TO:

President of Paraguay

Exmo. Sr. Presidente
de la República del Paraguay
Juán Carlos Wasmosy
Palacio de López
El Paraguayo Independiente y Ayolas
Asunción
Paraguay

Telegrams: Presidente Wasmosy, Asunción, Paraguay
Telexes: 411 SUBINFOR PY
Faxes: + 595 21 49 88 09;
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Exmo. Sr. Ministro del Interior
Dr Atilio R. Fernández
Ministerio del Interior
Estrella y Montevideo
Asunción

Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Asunción, Paraguay
Faxes: 595 21 44 00 44
Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Minister of Justice and Labour

Excmo. Sr. Ministro de Justicia
y Trabajo
Sebastián González Insfrán
Ministerio de Justicia y Trabajo
Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia y Estados Unidos
Asunción

Telegrams: Ministro de Justicia y Trabajo
Salutation: Sr. Ministro de Justicia y Trabajo/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Peasant Farmer Organization

Organización de Lucha por la Tierra
Casilla de Correo 10049
Asunción
Paraguay.

and to diplomatic representatives of PARAGUAY accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 September 1997.