

PUBLIC

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UA 161/09 Fear for safety

MEXICO Three rural communities in Coyuca de Catalán municipality, Guerrero state

Soldiers went into three rural communities in the southern state of Guerrero between 9 and 13 June, and tortured, shot at, threatened and harassed adults and children. The military incursion was intended to detain members of an armed opposition group, the Insurgent People's Revolutionary Army (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo Insurgente*, ERPI). The residents of these communities are at imminent risk of further attacks by the military.

On 9 June around 60 soldiers arrived in the subsistence farming communities of Puerto de las Ollas, Las Palancas and El Jilguero, in the mountainous Coyuca de Catalán municipality. They fired into the air and shot at the men of the villages as they fled into the mountains to hide. The following day, reinforcements arrived, bringing the total number of soldiers to around 500. Over five days women and children who remained in the villages were harassed and some were tortured. The army left on 13 June when an observation mission arrived, formed of human rights and other civil society organizations, including the Human Rights Commission of Guerrero (Coddehum).

According to the observation mission, a 14-year-old boy, Omar García, was tortured over three hours: he was given electric shocks, blindfolded, had his head covered with a plastic bag, was beaten and threatened with castration. A 33-year-old man, César Acosta Ávila, who suffers the effects of a brain haemorrhage from two years ago, was tortured for three hours: soldiers stuck needles under his fingernails, boxed his ears, covered his head with a plastic bag, beat him about the head and chest, threatened to give him electric shocks to the nipples and threatened him with imprisonment if he reported what they had done.

The soldiers threatened and harassed women during these five days in an attempt to get information about members of the armed group. They held knives to the throats of three women, pushed a pregnant woman between themselves and against a wall, and threatened to kill a woman with a baby. Soldiers are reported to have threatened and interrogated several children, including an 8 year-old boy at gunpoint.

The soldiers raided houses, stole and damaged property and threatened to burn down the houses. It is also reported that they attempted to fabricate evidence to link villagers to armed groups and drug trafficking.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The hamlets of Las Palancas, Puerto de las Ollas and El Jilguero are consisting of around 10-20 wooden houses each. For over a decade there have been tensions between residents and a local *cacique* (political strongman) who is believed to have links to a drug cartel. The operation of 9-13 June is thought to have been triggered by a statement released on 31 May by commander Ramiro of a local armed opposition group, the Insurgent People's Revolutionary Army (ERPI), in which he accused the *cacique* of using a paramilitary group against rural workers opposed to deforestation or the cultivation of drugs in the area.

Since 2008, Amnesty International has documented an increasing number of incidents throughout Mexico implicating soldiers in unlawful killings, torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and illegal house searches. The military justice system retains jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute military personnel accused of human rights violations.

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

- calling on the state and federal civilian authorities to order an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the reports of torture and harassment by soldiers of the residents of Las Palancas, Puerto de las Ollas and El Jilguero on 9-13 June;
- urging the authorities to ensure the safety of residents of the villages against future attacks, in accordance with their wishes.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General of the Republic

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Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Señor Procurador General

Minister of National Defence

Gral. Guillermo Galván Galván
Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional
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Salutation: Señor Secretario/Dear Minister

Governor of Guerrero

Lic. Zeferino Torreblanca Galindo
Gobernador del Estado de Guerrero
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Salutation: Dear Governor/Señor Gobernador

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Commission of Guerrero

Lic. Juan Alarcón Hernández, Presidente de la Comisión de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos del Estado de Guerrero (Coddehum), Avda. Juárez, Esq. Galo Soberón y Parra
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Salutation: Dear President/Señor Presidente

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 August 2009.