

**MEXICO Ramón Pérez Peñate (m), indigenous rights defender
Other members of the *Red de Defensores Comunitarios*, Community Defenders Network**

Paramilitary gunmen reportedly set fire to the house of indigenous rights defender Ramón Pérez Peñate, in Chiapas state on 8 December. Although he escaped unhurt, Amnesty International is concerned for his safety, and for that of other members of the *Red de Defensores Comunitarios*, Community Defenders Network.

The people who set his house on fire were reportedly members of *Paz y Justicia* ("Peace and Justice"), one of the main paramilitary groups operating in Chiapas, in southern Mexico. Ramón Pérez Peñate has been working on cases of a number of indigenous people who were reportedly abducted in the north of Chiapas during a confrontation between *Paz y Justicia* and the armed group *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), Zapatista National Liberation Army.

Over the last six months, members of the Community Defenders Network have been repeatedly threatened, attacked and harassed by paramilitaries because of their work publicising human rights abuses against indigenous communities in Chiapas. The indigenous rights defenders work within the community and therefore are also frequently targeted by the *caciques* (local political bosses) who are powerful figures in Mexico, particularly in Chiapas. They frequently control the political and economic life of areas with either the tacit or direct support of the local authorities and state security forces, enabling them to act with impunity.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Paz y Justicia, which emerged in 1995, is one of a number of paramilitary organisations that have been operating in Chiapas since the Zapatista guerrillas took up arms in January 1994. The attack on Ramón Pérez Peñate is the latest in a series of human rights violations attributed to paramilitaries in Chiapas, including the massacre of 45 indigenous men, women and children in Acteal in December 1997.

The authorities have failed to take concerted action to uphold the rule of law in Chiapas. The impunity enjoyed by paramilitaries and others responsible for human rights violations gives them free rein to continue, and increases the fear and tension in indigenous communities.

For many years, Amnesty International has documented systematic human rights violations against indigenous rights defenders and indigenous communities of Chiapas state by the security forces and paramilitary groups.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of indigenous rights defender Ramón Pérez Peñate and other members of the Community Defenders Network, and urging the authorities to provide them with adequate protection immediately;
- calling for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attacks against Ramón Pérez Peñate and members of the Community Defenders Network, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- expressing concern at the actions of paramilitary groups in Chiapas, and reminding the authorities that human rights defenders have a right to carry

out their activities without any restriction or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties.

APPEALS TO:

[please note that the telephone codes for Mexico are changing. Some of the numbers below have not been updated and you will be able to omit the (61), but with other numbers you will have to include it.]

Attorney General of Chiapas

Mariano Herrán Salvatti
Procurador General de Justicia del Estado de Chiapas
Libramiento Norte s/n
Infonavit el Rosario
Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas
México

Telegram: Procurador, Chiapas, México

Fax: + 52 9(61) 616 57 24

Salutation: Dear Attorney General / Señor Procurador

Governor of Chiapas

Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia
Gobernador del Estado de Chiapas
Palacio de Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas
Av. Central y Primera Oriente
Colonia Centro, C.P. 29009
Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas
México

Telegram: Gobernador, Chiapas, México

Fax: + 52 9(61) 612 09 17

Salutation: Dear Governor / Señor Gobernador

President of Chiapas State Human Rights Commission

Lic. Pedro Raúl López Hernández
Presidente de la Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos en el Estado de Chiapas
Boulevard Comitán 143
Col. Moctezuma
Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas
México

Fax: + 52 9(61) 602 56 09

Telegram: Presidente de CEDH, Chiapas, México

Salutation: Dear President / Señor Presidente

COPIES TO:

National human rights organisation

Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos A.C.
Tehuantepec 155
Col. Roma Sur
06760, México D.F.
MEXICO

Fax: + 52 (55) 5584 27 31

and 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 31 January 2002.