

via fax: 011 52 061 61 657 24 Lic. Mariano Herran Salvatti Attorney General of Chiapas, Mexico	via fax: 011 525 55 346 0908 Lic. Daniel Cabeza de Vaca Federal Attorney General of Mexico
via fax: 011 52 961 612 5618/612 9189 Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia Governor of Chiapas, Mexico	via fax: 011 525 55 961 61 7-70-20 ext. 16045 Lic. Horacio Schroeder Bejarano Minister of Public Security, Chiapas, Mexico

November 23, 2006

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are extremely concerned for the safety of **the indigenous community of Viejo Velasco Suarez, Chiapas State**, and for the life of **Diego Arcos Meneses**. Early in the morning of November 13, forty individuals in civilian clothes and armed with machetes and bats arrived in Viejo Velasco Suarez from Nueva Palestina. Soon thereafter, the community was attacked by 200 individuals armed with high caliber firearms usually commissioned by the military. Some of the attackers wore military clothes, some wore uniforms of the State Police (Policia Sectorial) and others wore balaclavas (ski masks). **Two men died and a woman was raped and killed** during the attack. Two people from Viejo Velasco are also being held hostage in the nearby community of Nueva Palestina and are at risk of being beaten or killed in retaliation for three victims of the confrontation: two attackers who died and one who was injured. Two other men remain missing, and 39 people are displaced.

On November 14, Diego Arcos Meneses, a resident of a nearby community, was walking near the site of the attack when he was threatened and detained by agents of the Attorney General-Selva Region. They forced him to load a dead woman onto their helicopter and took him to the Public Prosecutor's office in Palenque to be questioned as a witness to the November 13 attack. He doesn't speak Spanish well and cannot read it. He gave verbal testimony in Spanish but refused to sign the written version of his testimony because was not provided with interpretation and could not confirm its accuracy. As a result, he was beaten severely and was put into preventive custody.

The human rights organization Fray Bartolome de las Casas has documented these attacks as evidence of the government's forced evictions and relocations of indigenous communities that have been occurring since April, in violation of the 2005 agreement to regularize land rights.

We strongly urge that you

- either charge Diego Arcos Meneses with a recognizably criminal offense or release him immediately and investigate his beating and arbitrary arrest on November 14;
- ensure the safety of the inhabitants of Viejo Velasco Suarez who were displaced following the attack of November 13;
- take emergency measures to establish the whereabouts of those who are missing, and ensure the safe release of those held hostage in Nueva Palestina;
- identify without delay those who were killed; ensure a full, prompt and impartial forensic examination and secure protection of all evidence;
- carry out a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the violent confrontation of November 13, particularly of official involvement in that attack, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

Copies: Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolome de las Casas A.C. ~ via US mail
Ambassador Carlos Alberto De Icaza Gonzalez, Embassy of Mexico ~ via fax: 1 202 728 1698
Antonio O. Garza, Jr., U.S. Ambassador to Mexico ~ fax: 011 52 55 5511 9980
William Duncan, Desk Officer for Mexico ~ fax: 202.647.9894
U.S. Senators DeWine and Voinovich ~ via email
U.S. Representatives Brown, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

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The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: