

via fax: 011 52 961 61 657 24 Lic. Mariano Herran Salvatti Attorney General of Chiapas, Mexico	via fax: 011 525 55 346 0908 Lic. Eduardo Medina-Mora Icaza Federal Attorney General of Mexico
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September 16, 2007

We are concerned for the safety of six Tzeltal indigenous men, who, along with their families, were forcibly evicted from Selva Lacondona indigenous territory on August 18. (See our letter to you, September 3, 2007.)

The six men are being held in the El Amate prison (state prison number 14) in Chiapas state. They have been charged with damage to private property, 'ecological damage, illegal occupation, criminal association and carrying fire arms. Local organizations report that at least two of the six men have received death threats from other inmates in the prison who belong to a criminal gang. Members of the gang have been accused in the past of acting on the authority of prison officials to torture inmates.

We are also concerned for the health and well-being of the seven women (two of them pregnant and not receiving pre-natal care) and 26 children in detention. On September 6 the women and children were transferred (for the third time) to a warehouse in the main town of Ocosingo municipality, Chiapas. According to local human rights organizations, there is no clean water supply, proper sanitation facilities or electricity. Many are suffering from infections.

The future of the women and children is unclear. A senior state official visited them but made no commitment on how long they would be forced to live in the building or whether adequate alternative accommodation would be provided.

The Tzeltal indigenous families were forcibly evicted on August 18 from the settlements of Nuevo San Manuel and Buen Samaritano in the Montes Azules nature reserve, Chiapas State. Legal title to this land was given to the Lacandona indigenous community in 1972, but many other indigenous communities living on the land for many years were not acknowledged or given anything. As a result, disputes surrounding land claims persist. These six families were evicted after the Lacandona community made a legal complaint against all irregular occupation of the area. According to their own testimony, the evictees were given neither notification of the legal complaint against them nor warning of their eviction.

Based on the facts presented above, we strongly urge that you

- take decisive steps to protect the six detained men, especially since two have received death threats;
- ensure that the six men are given a fair trial, and that the rights of all 39 evictees are guaranteed, in accordance with due process of national and international human rights law;
- provide clean water, proper sanitation, nutrition, electricity and medical care for all those detained;
- stop the arbitrary detention of the women and children;
- suspend all evictions from Montes Azules until those in authority are assured that such evictions will be in conformity with international human rights law and standards ;
- ensure, in consultation with those affected, that all evictees have adequate alternative accommodation and access to food, drinking water and sanitation

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

Copies: Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolome de las Casas A.C. ~ via US mail
 Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan Casamitjana, Embassy of Mexico ~ via fax: 1 202 728 1698
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 U.S. Senators DeWine and Voinovich and 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:

