

via FAX: 011 52 55 5093 3414 <b>Lic. Juan Camilo Mourino Terrazo</b> Minister of Interior of Republic of Mexico	via FAX: 011 52 55 5346 0908 <b>Lic Eduardo Medina-Mora Icaza</b> Attorney General of the Republic of Mexico
via FAX: 011 52 951 502 0530 <b>Lic Ulises Ruiz Ortiz</b> Governor of the State of Oaxaca	via FAX: 011 52 951 503 0220 <b>Lic. Jaime Mario Pérez Jiménez</b> President of Oaxaca State Human Rights Commission

May 25, 2008

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force on Central America, are gravely concerned for the safety of those residents of the community of Santo Domingo Ixcatlan, Oaxaca State, who are opposing the pending sale of communal lands and also for the staff of The Center for Human Rights and Advice for Indigenous People (CEDHAPI). On the evening of April 30 a group of 40 armed men led by a local political boss (cacique) stopped **Gustavo Castañeda Hernández**, a local man opposed to the sale, as he drove through the center of Santo Domingo Ixcatlan. They beat him, forced him back into his car and set fire to it. Two other men opposed to the sale, **Melesio Martínez Robles** and **Inocencio Medina Bernabe**, came to help but were shot dead. The gunmen mutilated their bodies, dragged them through the streets and remained at the crime scene for several hours. State preventive police officers who arrived six hours later permitted the gunmen to drive away. The cacique, who is a former municipal president and brother of the current municipal president, has supported the sale of the land from which he seeks to profit. According to local inhabitants, he had openly organized the group of armed men to intimidate the community and impose his control.

Although the Policia Ministerial (investigative police officers) arrested the cacique on May 8, they have failed to serve arrest warrants for at least a dozen other people, including municipal officials.

The Center for Human Rights and Advice for Indigenous People (CEDHAPI) that is advising the families of the dead men has been under threats from the time they took up the case. On May 2, gunmen repeatedly fired into the air outside the CEDHAPI office.

We are aware that community leaders in southern states such as Oaxaca who try to strengthen local indigenous rights are frequently threatened and harassed, particularly by state and municipal authorities. Those responsible are rarely identified or brought to justice. We remind you that human rights defenders must be permitted to carry out their activities without restriction or fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration of the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

**We strongly urge that you take the following steps:**

- Ensure that community members opposing the land sale and staff members of CEDHAPI are protected from harm, in accordance with their needs and wishes.
- Carry out a prompt and impartial investigation into the killing of Gustavo Castañeda Hernández, Melesio Martínez Robles and Inocencio Medina Bernabe on April 30 and bring those involved to justice.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Coordinator

cc: CEDHAPI: Centro de Derechos Humanos y Asesoría a Pueblos Indígenas ~ via US mail  
 Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan Casamitjana, Mexican Embassy in Washington, DC ~ via fax: 202 728 1698  
 Ambassador Antonio O. Garza, Jr., US Embassy in Mexico ~ via fax: 011-52-55-5207-0091  
 William Duncan, Mexico Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202.647.5752  
 Paolo Carozza US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ fax: (202)458-3992  
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Latta, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Regula, Ryan, Sutton, 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:**