

Via Fax: 011 52 55 5093 3414 <b>Lic. Fernando Francisco Gómez-Mont</b> Minister of the Interior of Mexico	Via Fax: 011 52 961 616 5724 <b>Mtro. Raciél López Salazar</b> Attorney General of Chiapas, Mexico
Via Fax: 011 52 961 639 6615 <b>Lic. Juan Carlos Moreno Guillen</b> President of the Human Rights Commission of Chiapas, Mexico	

September 25, 2009

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force on Central America, are extremely **concerned for the safety of the people in the village of Ejido Jotola, Chilon municipality, Chiapas State**. On September 18, **Ricardo Lagunes Gasca**, a human rights lawyer with a local NGO, Fray Bartolome de las Casas Human Rights Center, was advising clients in Ejido Jotola. As he was driving away, about 50 men and women, armed with rifles, sticks and rocks, blocked the road. Ricardo Lagunes told them he was a human rights lawyer, but some of the men grabbed him, hit his head with a rock and forced him out of the car saying they were going to lynch him. Residents from Ejido Jotola intervened and he managed to escape. However, in the violence that followed, a man from Ejido Jotola, **Carmen Aguilar Gómez**, was shot in the thigh. Shortly before the attack, some of the attackers were seen talking to members of the state police. Although they were called to intervene, the police did not come until after the attack.

According to the community, the attackers are part of an armed group known as the Organization for the Protection of Indigenous and Peasants' Rights (OPDDIC). OPDDIC has been responsible for attacks and intimidation against communities in Chiapas believed to be sympathetic to the National Zapatista Liberation Army (EZLN). After the attack, armed members of OPDDIC occupied the local community center (casa ejidal) for two days and are still in the area.

This attack is a further example of a pattern of human rights defenders facing threats and attacks for their work in promoting human rights. Substantial efforts have not been made to investigate abuses. Because impunity is the general rule, the people are open to further attacks. Therefore we **strongly urge** you to

- investigate this attack, bring to justice those responsible, and establish why the police in the area did not intervene in a timely fashion to avoid the violence;
- protect the population of Ejido Jotola and those living nearby, as well as human rights defenders working in the surrounding area, in accordance with their wishes;
- follow the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders which recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without obstacles or fear of reprisals.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Coordinator

cc: Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolome de las Casas ~ via email  
 Arturo Sarukhan Casamitjana, Mexican Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 728 1698  
 Carlos Pascual, US Ambassador to Mexico ~ via fax: 011-52-55-5080-2834  
 Mary Stickles, 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 ~ via email  
 US Representatives Bocchieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Sutton, Wilson, Space ~ via email

UA 250/09-MEXICO

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