

Via fax 011 52 55 5093 3414
Lic. Fernando Francisco Gomez-Mont
 Minister of the Interior of Mexico

Via fax 011 52 951 502 0530
Lic. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz
 Governor of Oaxaca, Mexico

June 1, 2010

Dear Sirs:

We are writing to express our deep concern and indignation regarding the human rights abuses suffered by the indigenous population of the self-declared autonomous municipality of San Juan Cópala in the Triqui indigenous area of Oaxaca state. On May 20, at least two men entered the home in Yosoyuxi of **Timoteo Alejandro Ramírez** and his wife, **Cleriberta Castro Aguilar**, and murdered them by shooting them in the head. Timoteo Ramírez was one of the principal leaders of the 700 residents of San Juan Cópala as well as a leader of the Independent Movement for Triqui Unity and Struggle, the sector of Triqui indigenous peoples which has supported the creation of the autonomous municipality.

According to human rights organizations, shots were fired on the same day from the surrounding hills down into the streets of San Juan Cópala. The community has been under siege for a month by Ubisort, an armed group which has links to the ruling party (PRI) in Oaxaca. Their blockade of the community has severely restricted access to food, water, and other basic services. On May 14, twelve women and children from San Juan Cópala were abducted. They had gone to the local town of Juxtahuaca the previous day for provisions and medical care. As they returned to San Juan Cópala, fifteen armed men belonging to Ubisort stopped them at gunpoint. They were threatened, intimidated, and forced to stay the night in an abandoned building before being released unharmed the following day.

This abduction occurred just two days after we wrote to you (May 12) about the April 17 assassination by Ubisort of San Juan Cópala resident **José Celestino Hernández Cruz** and the April 27 armed attack on an international caravan of human rights observers trying to reach the Triqui community; killed were international observer **Jyri Antero Jaakola** from Finland and Oaxaca indigenous human rights defender **Beatriz Cariño**.

Based on the facts presented above, **we urge you to**

- ensure the safety of the residents of San Juan Cópala and other communities, such as Yosoyuxi, which are part of the self-declared autonomous municipality;
- conduct a full, open, and impartial federal investigation into the killing of Timoteo Alejandro Ramírez and Cleriberta Castro Aguilar, the indiscriminate shooting directed at San Juan Cópala from surrounding hills, and the temporary abduction on May 14 of twelve Triqui indigenous women and children by members of Ubisort;
- ensure that the residents of San Juan Copala are free to enter and leave their community without fear of attack and that all inhabitants have access to food, water and other basic services;
- investigate links between Ubisort and local government officials;
- communicate publicly the steps taken to investigate and punish all abuses committed by illegal armed groups operating in the region.

The attacks described above are not isolated incidents. Human rights defenders in Mexico, particularly leaders of indigenous peoples, face serious and constant human rights abuses. Sadly, state and federal authorities in Mexico have rarely taken action to hold accountable those responsible for these abuses. You have the power and the consequent responsibility to see that the human rights of all people within your jurisdiction are protected. We strongly urge you to do so.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

CC: Comision Diocesana de Justicia y Paz y al Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos "Bartolome Carrasco" ~ 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 Stickers, Mexico Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202.647.5752
 Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ fax: (202)458-3992
 José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ fax: (202)458-3992
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Boccieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

UA 110/10Update_Mexico

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