

via fax: 011 52 961 618 8050 EXT 21122 Lic. Juan Jose Sabines Guerrero Governor of the State of Chiapas	via fax: 011 52 961 639 6615 Lic. Juan Carlos Moreno Guillen President of the Commission of Human Rights of Chiapas
via fax: 011 52 961 61 657 24 Lic. Amador Rodriguez Lozano Minister of Justice of the State of Chiapas	

October 24, 2008

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply distressed that, on October 3, a police operation which ended in the **deaths of 6 people and wounding of 17 at the indigenous community of Miguel Hidalgo, La Trinitaria municipality in Chiapas State**. Since early September, residents of Miguel Hidalgo had been occupying the nearby Mayan Chinkultic ruins to protest the neglect of the archaeological site by the INAH (*Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*) and the concentration of profits from tourism in the municipality (outside the village).

On the morning of October 3 a group of about 40 state police officers entered the community of Miguel Hidalgo with the apparent intention of arresting community leaders responsible for organizing the occupation. The inhabitants resisted the police intervention by surrounding the officers, disarming them and detaining them in the community center. In the afternoon a larger police operation of 300 officers entered firing guns and teargas canisters. Two protesters were killed and 17 injured. Residents responded by throwing stones.

According to eyewitnesses, **Agustin Alfaro Alfaro**, a nearby resident, was traveling to Miguel Hidalgo with his wife and son in order to transport some of those injured to a hospital. En route, police shot at and stopped his van. Agustin Alfaro, who had been hit in the leg, was made to get out of the van and was shot in the chest. The police then proceeded to shoot four other people who were in the van. Agustin Alfaro and three other men died on the spot.

Despite the initial positive steps by the Chiapas governor, such as arresting some police officers associated with the operation and promising investigations and witness assistance, we are concerned that witnesses to these might events be at risk of intimidation and threats in order to deter them from seeking justice. Our concern is heightened by the fact that, in some previous cases, prosecutions of police for serious human rights violations have led to threats and intimidation of victims, witnesses, and their family members.

We therefore **strongly urge that you:**

- provide effective protection of the eye-witnesses of the events of October 3 so as to prevent intimidation or threats to them;
- conduct a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the police operation which killed six community members, make the findings public and bring those responsible to justice;
- ensure that victims and relatives receive full reparations via an appropriate legal process that will establish the responsibility of state institutions for the human rights violations committed;
- ensure that all eviction and police operations against communities meet international human rights standards on the minimum use of force and other related international human rights standards.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolome de las Casas A.C ~ via mail
Arturo Sarukhan Casamitjana, Mexican Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202 728 1698
Antonio O. Garza, Jr., US Ambassador to 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, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Regula, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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