



MORE CERJ EXECUTIONS IN GUATEMALA

(Guatemala) Amilcar Mendez Urizar, the leader of the Council of Ethnic Communities *Runujel Junam* "We are all Equal" (CERJ), was the victim of an attempted abduction and CERJ member, Camilo Ajqui Jimon was the victim of an extrajudicial execution on April 14th, 1991. Amilcar Mendez was about to get into his car on the Calzada (Avenue) Roosevelt in Zone 11 of Guatemala City, at 7:30 am on 15 April, when he was approached by four men in civilian clothing, wearing dark glasses. Two of the men attempted to seize him, but he managed to escape when people in the vicinity intervened. One of the men reportedly told Amilcar Mendez that he was going to die. Amnesty International is concerned for his safety, as well as for the safety of other CERJ members.

CERJ was formed in July 1988 to protect indigenous people's rights. It has been particularly active in protesting at peasants being forced to join in the ostensibly voluntary Civil Defense Patrols (PAC). Article 34 of the Guatemalan Constitution, which recognizes the right to freedom of association, states that no-one may be forced to serve in self-defense groups. The authorities maintain the patrols are voluntary, but there are scores of cases where peasants who have not wished to participate or have tried to withdraw from them, have been labeled "subversives" by the army and subjected to harassment, death threats and extrajudicial execution. The abuses have been carried out by

uniformed soldiers as well as by men in plain clothes, believed to be members of the security forces or acting under their orders.

CERJ has, since its foundation, been the target of a wide range of human rights violations. Since March 1990, at least 8 members are known to have been killed in circumstances suggesting official involvement. This figure includes the recent killing of Camilo Ajqui Jimon and two further members of CERJ who have been killed since President Jorge Serrano Elias took office in January, 1991.

Source: Amnesty International

COSTA RICA FINALLY RECOGNIZES INDIANS' CITIZENSHIP

(Costa Rica) President Rafael Angel Calderon last week formally signed into law a bill facilitating citizenship cards for thousands of undocumented Costa Rican Indians who for years had been denied citizenship. Many Indians were born in remote areas far from Civil Registry centers, so they never obtained the necessary papers to be granted citizenship. Once they have their citizenship cards, they will be eligible for Social Security health care and bank loans, benefits previously denied them.

"After 500 years, we are being recognized as Costa Ricans," said Pablo Sibar at a stirring ceremony attended by hundreds of Indians in San Jose's Parque de la Paz.

According to Enrique Rivera, president of the Teribe Indian Association of Terraba, the multinational fruit company Pindeco is growing papayas on land leased to it by a non-Indian inside the Indian reserve south of the Talamanca mountains in eastern Costa Rica. Much of the land reserved for Costa Rica's 30,000 Indian communities is being worked by non-Indians or has been sold off.

Source: The Tico Times, by Edward Orlebar