



INDIGENOUS LEADER TORTURED IN IMBABURA

(Ecuador) On June 11, 1991, José María Cabascango, 28 year old human rights secretary of CONAIE (the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), was detained by the army while travelling by car during a tour of local indigenous communities. He and others travelling with him were transferred to the Ecuadorian investigative police office in Ibarra. Cabascango was held until June 13 and was subjected to torture, including being hung from the thumbs, blows to the ears, mock executions and death threats.

During the last few years, there have been numerous land conflicts in the province of Imbabura involving indigenous communities and large landowners, some of which have resulted in the expulsion of these communities from land on which they were living. A large number of paramilitary groups have emerged in the area and appear to act against the Indian communities, either in combined operations with the army or police or with the acquiescence of the government. The killing, torture and harassment of many community members and leaders have been committed by these groups. For example, on December 19, 1990, Indian leader Julio Cabascango (not related to José María) was killed, apparently by a paramilitary group. The government initiated an inquiry and detained two people (one of whom escaped) believed to be responsible for the murder. Indian leaders are requesting not only that those responsible for the shooting be brought to trial but also those on whose behalf they acted.

On June 11, the Indian communities of the province of Imbabura declared a 48 hour strike. Such strikes usually involve road blocks but are non-violent in tactics and are usually supported by the local church, student unions and other organizations, as in this case. During the two day strike, 17 indigenous people, including José María Cabascango were detained, and about 12 others injured, reportedly by members of security forces.

The purpose of the strike was to request the intervention of the state into the land conflicts that affect Indian communities; to request the disbanding of paramilitary groups; to request the bringing to justice of those responsible for the 1990 killing of Indian leader Julio Cabascango; to request government investment in the region's infrastructure; and to request assistance for the growing problem of cholera in the area.

Source: Amnesty International



Please write to the Ecuadorean authorities:

- expressing concern at the reported torture of Indian leader José María Cabascango,
- noting that torture is forbidden under Ecuadorean legislation and that Ecuador has also ratified international treaties that oppose its use, including the UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
- asking for a full and impartial inquiry into the allegations of torture, that the nature of the findings be made public and, should the allegations be sustained, that those responsible be brought to justice.

Write to:

Dr. Rodrigo Borja Cevallos
Presidente de la República
Palacio del Gobierno
García Noreno 1043
Quito, ECUADOR