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Drawing courtesy of CONAIE

PARAMILITARY ATTACKS IN COTOCAXI

(Ecuador) A series of attacks on indigenous communities in the state of Cotopaxi began on September 21st. One indigenous leader was assassinated, and several others were kidnapped and injured. On the 23rd of September, CONAIE (the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador) issued a press release denouncing these attacks by paramilitary groups.

The latest series of events have their origins in a long-standing conflict over land rights. A decree dating back to 1825 granted five indigenous communities the rights to 15,000 hectares of land. Rights to 300 hectares of this land are being disputed by a group of local landowners, who also have legal property titles. In order to dislocate the indigenous communities from the land in question, the owners have organized armed paramilitary groups to terrorize Indian inhabitants. The army has also participated in the campaign of violence, as demonstrated by the recent detention and torture of Jose Maria Cabascango (unrelated to Julio), the human rights secretary of CONAIE. The escalating violence throughout the region, and the persecution and death threats made against Indian communities have made it impossible for the people of these communities to travel freely and safely.

On September 21st, at about 2:30 in the afternoon, a teacher by the name of Feliciano Tercero was travelling to the community of Churo Lozan for a meeting on bilingual school programs. He was attacked by a group of approximately 400 armed people, led by the powerful landowner Washington Albán. One Indian man, Virgilio Ganzino, was assassinated. Many others were wounded, and ten people were kidnapped, including Feliciano Tercero. Up until this moment, nothing is known of their fates.

Following this confrontation, the paramilitary bands went to the villages of Chine and Churo Lozan and launched a violent attack on those communities. Community members were beaten and mistreated, houses, possessions and property were destroyed, and animals were stolen.

Write to the President of Ecuador, and demand: 1. The complete dissolution of armed paramilitary groups in the countryside. 2. The detention and prosecution, to the fullest extent possible, of the people responsible for the attacks.

Presidente Rodrigo Borja, Palacio Nacional, Quito, ECUADOR

Telex: 393-223-75 PREREP ED

Please send copies of your letters to SAIC and to CONAIE at Los Granados 2553 y Av. 6 de Diciembre, Quito, ECUADOR.