

URGENT ACTION



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16 January 2009

UA 15/09 Fear for safety/Threats/Forced eviction

MEXICO Residents of Lomas del Poleo, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua state

People living in an area northwest of Ciudad Juarez called Lomas del Poleo, are being harassed and attacked by private security guards hired by landowners who dispute their ownership of the land. The incidents appear to have intensified since the end of last year, and the safety of the inhabitants is at particular risk as the Agrarian Tribunal in charge of deciding who the lands belongs to, started a series of hearings.

Residents of Lomas del Poleo claim they have been harassed and intimidated since 2003. Recent incidents include threats, attacks and destruction of property.

Residents report that on 10 October 2008 two local men, Alfredo Piñon Valenzuela and Martin Gabino were kidnapped by members of the Mexican army on suspicion of carrying weapons and drugs. They were beaten and threatened that “the same will happen to all residents of Lomas del Poleo if you don’t leave” (*eso le va pasar a todos en Lomas del Poleo si no se salen de sus casas*). Alfredo Piñon’s home was torn down by security guards on 23 October while he was testifying at the local Prosecutor’s office in relation to his kidnapping.

On 4 December, armed guards tore down the home of one woman who had previously been told to leave her home or be killed. On 27 December, 30 guards attempted to destroy the home of an elderly resident, but were prevented from doing so. On the night of 31 December 3 men went back to his home, beat him, tied him up and stole some of his belongings. On 7 January, the home of another woman was torn down and she was beaten. The guards threatened other residents with destroying the home if they intervened.

On 21 January, a group of residents will be attending a hearing at the Agrarian Tribunal, which should rule on the ownership of the land. Amnesty International is concerned about the continuous attacks against residents, particularly during and in the run up to the hearings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People living in the disputed area of Lomas del Poleo have been suffering harassment and attacks since 2003, when the supply of electricity was cut off. In 2004, the Lomas del Poleo neighborhood (over 200 homes, a primary school, a kindergarten and a church) were surrounded by a barbed wire fence, which is under the constant surveillance of armed private security guards who harass those who leave and enter the neighborhood, by claiming that the land is “private property.” In 2005, according to local inhabitants, 40 dwellings were set on fire and a resident was beaten to death by the guards for opposing the torchings. As a result of this campaign of intimidation, today only 25 families still reside in the area. They claim that despite reporting the incidents with the local prosecutor’s office no serious investigation or arrests have ever been carried out.

Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

The land of Lomas del Poleo has acquired particular value in recent years as it stands between the city of Ciudad Juárez and an area which is destined to be developed into a new urban and industrial area by a group of businessmen.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

- expressing concern for the continuous attacks on the residents of Lomas del Poleo;
- urging the authorities to ensure that they are given appropriate protection, particularly when they leave their homes to report abuses by private guards or attend hearings to determine the ownership of the land they live on;
- calling on the authorities to carry out their duty and conduct independent and impartial investigations into all the attacks reported by residents and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling for the fence to be taken down and for the security guards to stop immediately all harassment and surveillance of local residents;
- calling on the authorities to prevent the apparent attempts to forcibly evict residents of Lomas de Poleo and guarantee that evictions only take place in conformity with international human rights law and standards.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Chihuahua State

Lic. José Reyes Baeza Terrazas
Gobernador del Estado de Chihuahua
Palacio de Gobierno, 1er piso, C. Aldama #901
Col. Centro
Chihuahua, Estado de Chihuahua, C.P. 31000
MEXICO
Fax: 011 52 614 429 3300,
then dial extension 11066
Salutation: Señor Gobernador/Dear Governor

Attorney General of Chihuahua

Patricia González Rodríguez
Procuradora del Estado de Chihuahua
Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado
Vicente Guerrero 616
Col. Centro
Chihuahua 31000
MEXICO
Fax: 011 52 614 415 0314
**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/
Señora Procuradora**

Mayor of Ciudad Juárez

Lic. José Reyes Ferriz
Presidente Municipal de Ciudad Juárez
Unidad Administrativa Benito Juárez
Primer piso, ala norte
Av. Francisco Villa # 950 Norte, Cd. Juárez
Chihuahua
MEXICO
Fax: 011 52 656 615 0690
**Salutation: Dear Mayor/
Señor Presidente Municipal**

COPIES TO:

Local organization:

Foro Lomas del Poleo,
Email: foro.lomasdelpoleo@yahoo.com.mx

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Washington DC 20006
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PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action office if sending appeals after 27 February 2009.