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Amnesty International
International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 8DJ
United Kingdom

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EL SALVADOR: "DISAPPEARANCE" OF BALBINO AND LORENZO RAMOS ELIAS

Amnesty International is concerned at the reported detention and subsequent "disappearance" of two brothers, Balbino Ramos Elias, aged 46 and Lorenzo Ramos Elias, aged 48, both jornaleros (day labourers).

According to eye-witness reports, Balbino and Lorenzo Ramos Elias were detained on 27 May 1988 at 6.30 pm at their homes in the cantón (hamlet) San José Cortéz, jurisdiction Ciudad Delgado, San Salvador department, by uniformed soldiers of the 1st Infantry Brigade based at San Carlos. Two other people detained with them, were subsequently released. When Balbino and Lorenzo Ramos failed to appear, the family submitted a writ of habeas corpus to the Supreme Court of Justice.

On 28 May, members of the Ramos Elias family went to inquire at the headquarters of the 1st Infantry Brigade into the whereabouts of the two brothers. They say that a soldier informed them that two prisoners, matching the descriptions given by the family, were brought to the 1st Infantry Brigade at 10.00 pm on 27 May, but were transferred to the National Police on the morning of 28 May. The family then approached the National Police headquarters and a local police post, but were informed that no prisoners had been transferred from the 1st Infantry Brigade.

In response to inquiries made by local human rights groups, the commander of the 1st Infantry Brigade, Coronel Oscar Campos Amaya, denied detaining the brothers and issued a communique stating that "...on May 28, 1988 Balbino Ramos and Guadalupe (sic) Ramos, brothers of the ex-Civil Defence commander, Mr. Gregorio Ramos, were kidnapped by terrorist criminals...the kidnapping occurred at 03.00 on 28 May 1988... ("...que el 28 de mayo de 1988, Balbino Ramos y Guadalupe Ramos, quienes son hermanos del ex-comandante de la Escolta Civil, Señor Gregorio Ramos, fueron secuestrados por los delincuentes terroristas...El hecho del secuestro ocurrió a eso de las 03.00 el 28 de mayo de 1988...")

In a press conference given in response to the above army communiqué, the family pointed to various discrepancies in the information contained in it. Firstly, the family stated that they have never heard of Gregorio Ramos, (the ex-Civil Defence commander referred to in the army communiqué), nor of Guadalupe Ramos (also referred to in the army communiqué), and that neither were related to them. The family further stated that the brothers Balbino and Lorenzo Ramos Elias were detained on 27 May at 6.30 pm and not on 28 May at 03.00 hours as stated in the army communiqué.

At the time of writing the brothers remain "disappeared" and Amnesty International fears for their safety.

