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EL SALVADOR: "DISAPPEARANCE" OF JOSE ALFONSO LOPEZ RAMIREZ

Amnesty International is concerned about the "disappearance" of 32-year-old cooperative worker, José Alfonso López Ramírez, who was reportedly taken on 21 February 1987, from outside his home in the cantón (hamlet) of San José Las Flores, El Congo, Santa Ana department, by armed men in civilian clothes, whom he described to his family as being "authorities" ("autoridades"). José López is a member of the security committee (junta de vigilancia) of the agricultural Cooperative "La Divina Providencia", which is affiliated to the Federación de Asociaciones Cooperativas de Productos Agropecuarios de El Salvador (FEDECOOPADES), Federation of Agricultural Produce Cooperatives of El Salvador.

According to members of his family who witnessed his arrest, several armed men in plain clothes approached José López as he was leaving his home and asked for food. José López brought them the food, which they did not eat. It was at this point that José López told his family that the men were from the authorities ("son autoridades"). After talking with him for some time, the men took him away in a red truck, which had been parked on the Santa Ana-San Salvador motorway. The family immediately began a search at the security force and military installations in the area, but all denied holding him. A writ of habeas corpus was submitted to the Supreme Court on 19 March 1987, by José López's mother. Mrs. López wrote to President Duarte, asking whether José López was alive or dead, that the persons responsible for his arrest release him, and that if José had committed a crime, he be tried accordingly. José López, who has been lame since childhood and walks with the aid of crutches, remains "disappeared". Amnesty International is concerned for his safety and fears that, if held in unacknowledged detention, he may risk torture, "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution. Amnesty International first appealed on his behalf to the Salvadorian authorities on 25 February 1987 (See UA 58/87, AMR 29/09/87).

BACKGROUND

Trade unionists and cooperative workers have been a target of human rights abuse for many years in El Salvador. In January 1986, Amnesty International called for an official inquiry into a number of incidents involving the arrest, torture, "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution of 52 trade unionists apparently because of their union activities. Amnesty International is concerned that cooperative workers and leaders have been particular targets of repression in recent months. Amnesty International has received reports that in the period September 1986 - May 1987 over 80 cooperative workers and leaders, many of them members of FEDECOOPADES, were subjected to human rights violations, including "disappearance", extrajudicial execution, arbitrary detention and beatings. Many of those

detained were subsequently released without charge.

A recent incident involved the killing of Antonio de Jesús Hernández Martínez, Secretary General of the Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Agropecuarios (ANTA), National Association of Agricultural Workers of San Miguel department. He is reported to have been seized on 16 April 1987 by soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Brigade in San Juan de los Velásquez where he had gone to distribute funds to peasant cooperatives to buy corn. His body, showing apparent marks of torture, was reportedly found on the banks of the river Chicuelo, San Juan de los Velásquez, San Luis de la Reina jurisdiction, San Miguel Department. An investigation carried out by the Oficina de Tutela Legal del Arzobispado (Legal Aid Office of the Archbishopric), suggested army responsibility. According to international press reports, however, military spokesman Colonel Mauricio Hernández, who was asked about the case "neither confirmed nor denied the army's involvement and said the military was not investigating it."

Amnesty International recently appealed on behalf of three trade unionists abducted by armed men in plain clothes on 1 May 1987 while they were on their way home to Chalchuapa, Santa Ana, after participating in May-day demonstrations. They were Edwin Ernesto Vargas Aguilar and Luis Armando Lemus Urrutia, both employees of the Montealegre Coffee Plant and members of the Sindicato de la Industria del Café (SI-CAFE), Coffee Industry Union. Both are also students at the Universidad de Occidente (the university in the western part of the country). Julio Ernesto García Lucero, aged 18, a baker and member of the Sindicato de Panificadores (Bakers Union), was also abducted with them. Immediately after learning of their "disappearance", the parents of the three went to ask for their sons at the 2nd Infantry Brigade barracks in Santa Ana, where they believed the men had been taken following their abduction. The authorities deny holding them and their whereabouts remain unknown (See AI Index: AMR 29/29/87 of 10 July 1987).

BACKGROUND

Trade unionists and cooperative workers have been a target of human rights abuse for many years in El Salvador. In January 1986, Amnesty International called for an official inquiry into a number of incidents involving the arrest, torture, "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution of 25 trade unionists apparently because of their union activities. Amnesty International is concerned that cooperative workers and leaders have been particular targets of repression in recent months. Amnesty International has received reports that in the period September 1985 - May 1987 over 80 cooperative workers and leaders, many of them members of FEDCOOPAJER, were subjected to human rights violations including "disappearance", extrajudicial execution, arbitrary detention and beatings. Many of these