

Chiapas: CDHFBC employee injured by OPDDIC in armed attack

An employee of the Human Rights Center Fray Bartolome de Las Casas (Frayba) was brutally attacked on September 18th. The attack occurred in Ejido Jotola, in the municipality of Chilon. The attackers were armed and are members of OPDDIC – the Organization for the Defense of the Rights of Indigenous and Campesinos. Because of the seriousness of the attack, please find below the Frayba press release in its entirety.

“San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas September 18th, 2009

Press Release No. 30

Frayba employee injured by OPDDIC in armed attack

The paramilitary group Organization for the Defense of the Rights of Indigenous and Campesinos (OPDDIC) has ambushed and attacked a Frayba member and shot and injured a resident of San Sebastian Bachajon.

Today, at approximately 12 noon, Frayba employee Ricardo Lagunes Gasca was attacked while he was travelling in the area of Tila. The event occurred when Ricardo stopped in Ejido Jotola, in the municipality of Chilon, to get information for a legal action he is undertaking in his role as lawyer for Frayba. The legal action is to defend residents of San Sebastian Bachajon who have been jailed. At the time, the people of San Sebastian Bachajon were holding a work meeting with the residents of Jotola, both of whom are supporters of The Other Campaign.

After getting up to date about the situation of the prisoners Ricardo tried to leave the place in one of Frayba’s vans, but approximately 40 meters ahead the road was closed with rocks and a tree trunk. Unable to continue along the road, he was forced to stop. Ricardo was then ambushed and beaten by a group of approximately 60 people armed with sticks, rocks, machetes and guns. The attackers were all members of OPDDIC. While beating him, they forced Ricardo out of the van and took the car keys to try to take him to an unknown location.

Despite Ricardo’s attempts to talk to the OPDDIC members, the attack continued, putting his life in danger. The residents of Jotola and San Sebastian Bachajon (supporters of the Other Campaign) came to his aid and the OPDDIC attackers became distracted. Ricardo used this opportunity to flee, leaving all his belongings in the van.

After the intervention of the Other Campaign members the OPDDIC attackers reacted by shooting their guns, resulting in a bullet wound in the thigh of the left leg of Mr. Carmen Aguilar Gomez the 2nd, resident of San Sebastian Bachajon. After the gun attack, the Other Campaign members fled to avoid more confrontation with the OPDDIC. Despite

this, the OPDDIC attackers surrounded the residents' homes and threatened to come in as well as take over the main meeting hall by force.

As of 4:00 pm today (Friday) Frayba employees had received information from the residents of Ejido Jotola saying they have sought shelter in their homes. The residents have told us that approximately 20 people from OPDDIC are on guard with guns of various calibers and they have taken possession of the main meeting hall.

Background:

In the morning prior to the attack residents of Jotola saw individuals from the Preventative Police force (PEP) interviewing members of OPDDIC. According to several witnesses they could hear the OPDDIC members saying they were going to enter the main meeting hall and destroy the sign and attack the followers of the Other Campaign. Moments later, when Ricardo got in his vehicle, men and women from OPDDIC blocked the way even though our colleague identified himself as a worker from the Human Rights Center Fray Bartolome de Las Casas.

While the residents of Jotola and Bachajon were together in the meeting hall in the morning, members of OPDDIC were gathered 40 meters away where there was a patrol of the Preventative Police (PEP). The individuals of the Preventative Police maintained a dialogue with the OPDDIC. The events occurred after a sign had been placed in the meeting hall – the same one that had been robbed by members of OPDDIC the week before.

On August 20th residents of Jotola and Bachajon who are followers of the Other Campaign held a press conference to denounce the climate of harassment and threats because of OPDDIC. It was revealed at this time that those responsible for the harassment were originally from the communities of Jotola and Bachajon. They had previously been expelled from Monte Libano and had outstanding arrest warrants for murder and rape.

Also during the press conference Nemesio Ponce Sanchez, the General undersecretary of the government, was denounced for refusing to meet with the residents who had completed their promise of meeting in the offices of Frayba. They were supposed to fix a deadline for releasing two of the eight indigenous tseltals who remain behind bars in CERSS No. 14, also known as "El Amate". The prisoners have been accused of criminal association and armed robbery, both false accusations as revealed by Frayba.

Later that same day the residents called Frayba to report they were being harassed by members of the Preventative Police (PEP) and there were patrols set up close to their homes, and especially close to the house of the head of the cooperative land association, Pascual Sanchez Perez. Since then, the PEP has maintained permanent patrols. At the beginning of September an official source told Frayba the accusations made at the August 20th press conference bothered General undersecretary Nemesio Ponce Sanchez. Apparently Ponce Sanchez had ordered officers of the Ministerial and Preventative Police

to detain Pascual Sanchez Perez, the head of the cooperative land association, and professor Ricardo Sanchez, the spokesperson for Jotola, during the press conference.

Frayba condemns this act of aggression. It is an act of aggression that has been carried out within a context of hostility as well as the targeting different actors and methods of communication that work for the defense of human rights. Frayba points out the role the State government, including that of Juan Sabines Guerro, as promoters of aggression that goes against the work of this human rights center in areas of defense and accompaniment.

List of OPDDIC attackers as identified in Jotola:

1. Agustin Hernandez Santis ? (carried and fired a shotgun)
2. Guadalupe Cruz Mendez ? (carried a .22 rifle and a pistol, fired and shot Carmen Aguilar.)
3. Medardo Cruz Mendez ? (carried a .22 rifle)
4. Miguel Gomez Hernandez ? (carried .22 rifle and 16-shot semi-automatic)
5. Manuel Moreno Perez ? (carried a machete and stick)
6. Daniel Moreno Perez ? (carried a gun)
7. Rogelio Cruz Mendez (carried a shotgun)
8. Eva Guzman Hernandez
9. Ernestina Guzman Hernandez
10. Margarita Miranda Perez
11. Marian Sanchez Sanchez
12. Ofelia Cruz Jimenez
13. Maria Hernandez Lopez
14. Maria Elena Gomez Lopez
15. Ema Maria Sanchez Gomez
16. Juana Sanchez Gomez
17. Juan Cruz Mendez ? (carried a pistol)

18. Leandro Mendez Hernandez.”

For more informationn (in Spanish):

http://www.frayba.org.mx/archivo/boletines/090918_30_agresion_paramilitares_en_jotola.pdf

[Ataca Opddic en Chiapas a ejidatarios adherentes a la Otra Campaña \(Jornada, 19/09/09\)](#)