

Paramilitaries Ambush International Aid Caravan, Two Dead

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by Kristin Bricker

San Juan Copala, Oaxaca – On Tuesday afternoon at about 2:50pm, people believed to be paramilitaries affiliated with the ruling party of Oaxaca ambushed an international aid caravan en route to San Juan Copala. At least two people are reported dead.

The caravan was carrying food, water, and other basic necessities to San Juan Copala, which has been subject to a paramilitary blockade that has prevented anyone from entering or leaving the community since January. In addition to carrying much-needed supplies, the caravan was meant to accompany teachers who were returning to classes after paramilitaries denied them access to the community nearly five months ago. The caravan included representatives from the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), Section 22 of the teachers union, the Center for Community Support Working Together (CACTUS), Oaxacan Voices Constructing Autonomy and Liberty (VOCAL), two reporters from the Mexican magazine Contralinea, and international observers from Belgium, Finland, Italy, and Germany.

San Juan Copala has been under constant siege from pro-government paramilitaries since it declared itself autonomous following the 2006 peaceful uprising that shook the state and nearly drove the governor out of office. One such paramilitary organization, the Union for the Well-being of the Triqui Region (UBISORT), warned that the caravan could be in danger if it attempted to enter San Juan Copala. UBISORT leader Rufino Juárez Hernández told press that shoot-outs were a constant occurrence in the region, and that his organization would not be held responsible for “what could happen” to the caravan. Reports from survivors indicate that at approximately 2:50 pm just outside the community of La Sabana, which is controlled by UBISORT, the caravan reached a blockade of rocks piled on the road. As the vehicles began to turn around to head back, they came under fire from gunmen who were hiding in the brush. “They started shooting like madmen,” says one survivor.

Monica Citlali Santiago Ortiz, 22, was shot in the back. She is being treated in a hospital in Juxtlahuaca. The total number of wounded and dead is unknown. Paramilitaries continue to blockade the area, making rescue impossible. The paramilitaries did allow police to remove two bodies from the area this afternoon. They have been identified as Alberta “Bety” Cariño, the director of CACTUS, and Juri Jaakkola, an observer from Finland. Survivors who fled into the brush when the caravan came under attack are beginning to surface as they make their way out of the area and into larger towns. Nonetheless, an unconfirmed number of people are still missing. VOCAL reports that two of its members remain missing after they fled into the brush. CACTUS reports another four missing, including the two Contralinea reporters and Martin Sautan, a Belgian citizen.

Paramilitaries briefly detained VOCAL member, Ruben Valencia. He reports that the gunmen took his identification and cell phone and threatened to kill him before releasing him along the side of a road. The Oaxacan government has denied all responsibility for the attack, claiming that it had no knowledge of the caravan.

Eduardo Almeida from the human rights organization Nodo de Derechos Humanos said, "We fear that the government will use this as a pretext to militarize the region."

source: <http://mywordismyweapon.blogspot.com/2010/04/oaxaca-paramilitaries-ambush.html>

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What you can do

Write letters to:

Presidente Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos
Lic. Felipe Calderón Hinojosa.
Residencia Oficial de los Pinos, Casa Miguel Alemán, Col. San Miguel
Chapultepec, C.P. 11850, México DF. Tel: +52 55 27891100; Fax: +52 55 527
72 376. E-mail: felipe.calderon@presidencia.gob.mx

Secretario General de Gobernación.
Lic. Fernando Gomez Mont.
Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez, Delegación Cuauhtémoc, México
D.F., C.P. 06600, México, FAX +52 (55) 5093 34 14. Email:
secretario@segob.gob.mx

Licenciado Eduardo Medina-Mora Icaza
Procurador General de la República,
Procuraduría General de la República, Paseo de la Reforma nº 211-213,
Piso 16, Col. Cuauhtémoc, Del. Cuauhtémoc, México D.F., C.P. 06500, Fax:
+52 55 53 46 09 08; + 52 55 27 89 11 13 (si responde una voz, digan: "tono
de fax, por favor"), Correo Electrónico: ofproc@pgr.gob.mx /
wmaster@pgr.gob.mx

Presidente de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos
Dr. Raúl Plascencia Villanueva.
Lic. Mauricio E. Montes de Oca Durán,
Unidad para la promoción y defensa de los derechos humanos SEGOB, Av.
Paseo de la Reforma 99 Piso 19 Tabacalera, Cuauhtémoc, Distrito Federal,
06030, Tel: (55) 51-28-00 Ext: 11863, Email: mmontesdeoca@segob.gob.mx
Alto Comisionado para los Derechos Humanos en México.

Sample letters in English and Spanish:

To Whom It May Concern,

A day before the terrible events that took place on 27th April near the community of San Juan Copala, Oaxaca, we received a communique from the groups and individuals who were going to participate in the international aid caravan travelling in convoy towards that community.

The Caravan participants informed us of the daily state of terror in which the residents of this autonomous community have been living, and their urgent need of support through the presence of members of civil society, both Mexicans and internationals.

With deep sorrow we learn of the murders of Tyri Antero Jaakkola, who as an international human rights observer answered the call of the caravan, and of Beatriz Alberta Cariño Trujillo, director of CACTUS (Oaxacan organisation, the Centre for Community Support Working Together) and member of the Southeast Mexican Indigenous Community Radio Network. We demand that the truth be made known concerning the circumstances of their deaths and that those guilty of this crime be brought to justice.

We hold the Mexican state and the government of Ulises Ruiz responsible of these heinous acts. We denounce official government accounts of events, which have claimed that this was a confrontation between two different groups, when in fact is common knowledge this was an operation by paramilitary groups who function under the patronage and protection of his government.

We demand the lifting of the blockade of the autonomous municipality of San Juan Copala, and an end to the attacks against this community.

A Quien Corresponda,

Un día antes de los terribles hechos ocurridos el 27 de abril, cerca de la comunidad de San Juan Copala, Oaxaca. Recibimos un comunicado por parte de los grupos y personas que formarían parte de la Caravana de Observación por los Derechos Humanos que se trasladaría a dicha comunidad.

En éste documento se nos informó el terror diario en que vive el pueblo de ésta comunidad autónoma y la urgencia de asistir a los pobladores por medio de la presencia de miembros de la sociedad civil nacional e internacional.

Con profundo dolor recibimos las noticias de los asesinatos de Tyri Antero Jaakkola, observador internacional por los derechos humanos y de Beatriz Alberta Cariño Trujillo, directora de CACTUS (Centro de Apoyo Comunitario Trabajando Unidos) y miembro de la radio comunitaria. Exigimos se de a conocer la verdad de las circunstancias de sus muertes y el castigo a los autores materiales e intelectuales.

Responsabilizamos al estado mexicano y al gobierno ilegal de Ulises Ruiz de estos hechos atroces. Le exigimos que ¡No Mienta!, al decir que se trató de una confrontación de grupos opositores. Cuando se sabe que estos grupos paramilitares operan bajo el patrocinio y encubrimiento de su gobierno.

Demandamos el levantamiento del bloqueo a la comunidad autónoma de San Juan Copala, y el fin de los ataques a ésta comunidad.