

Mexican troops detain illegal loggers

The Miami Herald
Jun. 11, 2007

MEXICO CITY --

Mexican police and soldiers arrested three men Monday during an operation to fight illegal logging in a mountain region south of Mexico City where an environmentalist was killed last month.

More than 1,000 officers, soldiers and federal agents fanned out across the township of Ocuilan, whose residents have waged a six-year battle against loggers cutting down one of central Mexico's last big fir forests.

Police in Mexico state, which borders the area, said they detained Everardo Garcia Martinez, 52, Raul Flores Gonzalez, 50, and Eric Garcia Gallegos, 20, as they drove a truck packed with more than two tons of illegally taken dirt - a byproduct of logging.

The men were arrested for illegal logging. Authorities did not say whether they were connected to the shooting death of Aldo Zamora, 21, on a nearby road on May 15.

Environmentalists, however, doubted the raid would solve the problem of logging or find Zamora's killers.

"This is too little, too late," said Hector Magallanes, a member of Greenpeace Mexico which had worked with Zamora on a project to measure the rate of deforestation and remaining tree cover.

He also said detained loggers are usually released quickly and return to the illegal work.

"This is organized crime," he said. "If they just do raids and catch only the underlings ... this is just going to go on."

Aldo's father and longtime anti-logging activist, Ildefonso Zamora, said he believes his son's killers are residents associated with the logging. He said he received threats before the attack on his son, in which another son, Misael, 16, was also wounded.

The forest stretches roughly 20 miles and loses some 5,930 acres - or about 2 percent of its area - every year to illegal logging.