

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/Death Threats

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Adonis Polanco (m), HIV/AIDS activist
His family

An HIV/AIDS activist has been receiving anonymous death threats, apparently because of his outspoken criticism of the government's failure to provide adequate treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS in the country. Amnesty International believes that he and his family are in grave danger.

Adonis Polanco works for a network of people living with HIV/AIDS and is a treatment counsellor in a local health clinic in his home town of Boca Chica, an hour's drive east of the capital, Santo Domingo.

On 5 June he took part in the public launch in Santo Domingo of the Amnesty report "*I'm not ashamed!*" *HIV/AIDS and human rights in the Dominican Republic and Guyana* (AMR 01/002/2006), where he spoke of the obstacles faced by people living with HIV/AIDS in Boca Chica and the lack of support from the government. The event was front-page news in one of the two main national daily newspapers, and his name appeared in the report. He fears that the event will have raised his profile in a way that will put him in danger, and also his wife and their five children, aged between nine months and 12 years.

On the evening of 14 May he had received an anonymous phone call at home from a woman who told him, "*deja de hablar tanto...la gente se desaparece*", "don't talk so much...people disappear". In mid-April a man had called him and said that if he continued speaking out "*vas a aparecer con la boca llena de moscas*", "you'll show up with your mouth full of flies" (meaning, "you'll end up dead").

In October 2005 he had given a radio interview in which he denounced the government's failure to provide him with treatment after he tested HIV-positive in 2004. After the interview he allegedly found that the brakes on his motorcycle had been tampered with. Since then he has allegedly been followed several times by cars with no license plates and now avoids being outside his home after 6.30pm.

He reportedly began receiving threatening phone calls in June 2005, after he gave radio interviews in which he criticised the government's failure to provide him with the treatment he needed after he tested HIV-positive. It was after this that he began his activism on behalf of other people living with HIV/AIDS, which has resulted in his being the target of threats and intimidation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the past year Amnesty International has documented several cases of human rights defenders in the Dominican Republic receiving threats because of their work protecting and promoting the rights of their fellow citizens.

Some 88,000 people, or 1.7 per cent of the population, are living with HIV/AIDS in the country. Despite receiving considerable international funding the Dominican government is only providing antiretroviral treatment to only a third of the estimated 10-15,000 people needing it and without which their life expectancy is greatly reduced. In the past 18 months Adonis Polanco has seen more than 20 inhabitants of Boca Chica die because they were unable to obtain treatment for HIV/AIDS.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern that Adonis Polanco has been receiving death threats because of his work on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS;
- calling on the authorities to carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into the threats, to make the results public and to bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to provide adequate protection for Adonis Polanco and his family, in accordance with their wishes;
- pointing out that the work of activists and non-governmental organizations who provide help and support to people living with HIV/AIDS is of vital importance, and urging the authorities to ensure they are free to carry out their work without fear of harassment and intimidation.

APPEALS TO:

President

S.E. Leonel Fernández
Presidente de la República
Palacio Nacional
Santo Domingo
Dominican Republic

Fax: +1 809 682 0827

Email: correspondencias@presidencia.gov.do

Salutation: Su Excelencia Señor Presidente/Your Excellency

Attorney General

Sr. Francisco Domínguez Brito
Procurador General de la República
C/Hipólito Herrera Billini Esq. Juan B. Pérez,
Centro de los Héroes, Constanza, Maimón y Estero Hondo
Santo Domingo
Dominican Republic

Fax: +1 809 533 4098

Salutation: Estimado Señor Brito/Dear Sir

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Franklin Almeyda Rancier
Secretario de Estado del Interior y la Policía
Ave. México, Esq.
Leopoldo Navarro,
Edif. Oficinas Gubernamentales,
Santo Domingo
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Fax: +1 809 221 8324

Salutation: Señor Secretario/Dear Sir

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Dominican Republic accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 July 2006.