

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Apparent Extrajudicial Execution

7 August 1992

EL SALVADOR:

Salvador Iván RAMIREZ, trade union leader

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at the killing on 31 July 1992 of Salvador Iván Ramírez, a trade union leader who had returned from exile abroad 13 months earlier. The organization is concerned that the killing appears to have been committed by agents of the government of El Salvador and that other trade unionists have been subjected to threats.

Salvador Iván Ramírez was Conflicts Secretary (Secretario de Conflictos) of the Federación Nacional Sindical de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (FENASTRAS), the National Trade Union Federation of Salvadorian Workers. According to witnesses, at around 4.20am on 31 July, as he sat in a restaurant in San Salvador's Redondel Masferrer, he was approached by three unidentified gunmen. One was reported to have singled him out saying "Vos sos" ("you're the one"), after which they fired six bullets into him. Although a thorough investigation has yet to be carried out, government sources have reportedly attributed the killing to a personal dispute. However, the testimony of witnesses and other circumstantial evidence appears to refute this claim.

According to FENASTRAS and human rights sources, Salvador Iván Ramírez began to receive threats some six months after his return from exile in Sweden. On 13 December 1991, he received a threatening telephone call from an individual identifying himself as "Mano Blanca" ("White Hand", a name long associated with the so-called "death squads"). Anonymous telephone calls on 23 January and 14 February 1992 warned him that he would be killed if he did not withdraw from his trade union activity. On 13 March 1992, his home was searched in his absence by armed men in plainclothes who warned his family not to report the incident. The next day unidentified armed men were seen watching the Ramirez family's home.

Salvador Iván Ramírez was a prominent figure within the trade union movement. He had been involved in an ongoing dispute with the mayor of San Salvador over the creation of a union of street vendors, a sector frequently harassed by Municipal and National Police in San Salvador. As labour advisor (asesor laboral) for the construction workers' union Sindicato de Obreros de la Industria de la Construcción de El Salvador (SOICES), he had been involved in organizing strike action by the union which began in early July.

Salvador Iván Ramírez left El Salvador in the mid-1980s fleeing fierce government repression against trade unionists. He returned in June 1991 in the hope that the approaching end of the armed conflict in the country would offer guarantees for his safety and renewed space for his trade union activities.

Other FENASTRAS members including Secretary General Juan José Huezco and Miguel Alfredo Ramírez have also received anonymous death threats in recent months.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Throughout the 12 years of armed conflict between the government and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), trade union members have been prime targets of extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and torture by the Salvadorian armed forces and "death squads" created by or linked to them. The armed forces and the civilian authorities have repeatedly accused certain unions of being front groups for FMLN. In October 1989 10 FENASTRAS members, including its former Secretary General Febe Velásquez, were killed in a bomb attack on their premises following a publicity campaign in the pro-government press linking FENASTRAS to the FMLN. On 13 December 1991, two days after calling for a full investigation into the still unresolved massacre, the current Secretary General of FENASTRAS, Juan José

Huezo, received written death threats (see UA 450/91, AMR 29/14/92, 18 December 1991).

In January 1992 the government and the FMLN signed a peace agreement in which the FMLN agreed to demobilize in exchange for a wide range of military, judicial and socio-economic reforms and the creation of new mechanisms for human rights protection. Certain military and security force units notorious for human rights violations have now been disbanded, but the implementation of many of the agreements has been delayed. Meanwhile human rights violations have continued since the signing of the peace, including unclarified "death squad"-style killings and death threats against prominent critics of

page 2 of UA 260/92...

the government, trade unionists in particular.

A series of recent strikes in protest at the government's economic programme and delays in implementing the agreed socio-economic reforms have led to public accusations by the authorities that certain trade unions are fomenting unrest and jeopardising the peace process. In July 1992 FENASTRAS General Secretary Juan José Huezo was again the target of anonymous death threats. Some such threats have been carried out. In March 1992, trade unionists Nazario de Jesús Gracia was murdered, several months after being arrested and threatened with death by the National Police.

Although these incidents have been reported to the authorities, as well as to the human rights division of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), the authorities have routinely failed to investigate such cases effectively. AI believes that the failure to identify and punish those responsible for human rights violations is a key contributory factor to their continuation and undermines the effectiveness of other human rights-related reforms resulting from the peace accords.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the apparent extrajudicial execution of FENASTRAS leader Salvador Iván Ramírez on 31 July 1992;
- calling on the appropriate authorities to carry out an immediate and thorough investigation into his killing which will result in the bringing to justice of those responsible;
- urging that steps be taken to guarantee the safety of other trade unionists including Juan José Huezo and Miguel Alfredo Ramírez who have received death threats;
- stressing your belief that human rights violations, which have continued since the peace accord, can only be eradicated if effective human rights reforms are implemented in practice and if perpetrators of human rights violations are held to account for their acts.

APPEALS TO:

1. President

S.E. Alfredo Cristiani Burkard

Faxes: + 503 98 17 74

Salutation: Sr Ministro / Dear Minister

Presidente de la República de El Salvador,
Casa Presidencial
San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Presidente de la República
de El Salvador, San
Salvador, El Salvador**

Telexes: 20245 RS SAL

Faxes: + 503 71 09 50; + 503 79 34 01

Salutation: Sr Presidente / Dear President

2. Foreign Minister

Sr. José Manuel Pacas Castro
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Bld. Manuel Enrique Araujo km6
San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Ministro de Relaciones
Exteriores, San Salvador, El Salvador**

Telexes: 20179 RREE SAL

3. Human Rights Procurator

Dr. Carlos Molina Fonseca

Procurador Nacional de Derechos Humanos
Procuraduría General de la República
13a C.Poniente, Centro de Gobierno
San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegrams: Procurador Nacional de Derechos
Humanos, San Salvador, El Salvador**

Salutation: Sr Procurador / Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

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Armed Forces Human Rights Office
Mayor Roberto Molina
Jefe - Oficina de Derechos Humanos
Estado Mayor Conjunto de la Fuerza Armada
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San Salvador, El Salvador

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and to diplomatic representatives of El Salvador accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 September 1992.