

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 34/08/96

UA 62/96

Fear for Safety

1 March 1996

**GUATEMALA** Vilma Cristina GONZÁLEZ (f)

**Reynaldo Federico GONZÁLEZ, brother of above, trade union leader**

**Verónica VÁZQUEZ (f), assistant to Reynaldo Federico González**

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Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of Vilma Cristina González, who was abducted, tortured and raped on 27 February 1996 by armed men in civilian clothes, of Verónica Vázquez, who was victim to an attempted abduction on the same day, and of Vilma's brother Reynaldo Federico González.

Both Vilma and Reynaldo have been warned to leave the country.

On the evening of 27 February 1996 four heavily armed men pushed Vilma Cristina González into a black van with tinted glass windows as she was leaving work at the post office. They drove around for about four hours during which time they beat her, gave her sedatives and raped her. They reportedly told her to affirm that her brother, Reynaldo Federico González, was involved with the armed opposition, the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG), Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity. They also said that they knew he was involved with the *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo por el Aparecimiento con Vida de Nuestros Familiares* (GAM), Mutual Support Group for the Appearance of Our Relatives Alive and with the *Frente Democrático Nacional de Guatemala* (FDNG), New Guatemala Democratic Front, a recently formed political party of the left. They are alleged to have warned her that if she and her brother did not leave the country, she and her family would be killed.

They abandoned her at about 10.00pm near the offices of a radio station, *Prensa Libre* (Free Press). Staff from the radio station took her to the hospital belonging to the *Instituto de Seguridad Social* (Social Security Institute).

The forensic examination carried out showed that she had suffered "multiple beatings and injuries to the skin" "*múltiples golpes y lesiones en la piel*" and that she had been raped.

On the night of 29 February a written threat was delivered to the home of Vilma and Reynaldo's mother. It said, "*whore, we gave you 48 hours to leave the country. If you show this to the police, we will shoot you down wherever you are - you and your family. We told you not to say anything and you did, bitch.*"

*You are not going to have a good night. We are going to get hold of your daughters in the same way that we are going to get you ...."*

On the same day that Vilma González was abducted, a grey-haired man attempted to abduct Verónica Vázquez as she was waiting for a bus on 9 Avenue, 10th Street.

He reportedly tried to get her into a van with tinted glass windows and threw her against a wall. She kicked him, managed to run off and get on to a bus.

Reynaldo Federico González, Secretary General of the *Federación Sindical de Empleados Bancarios y de Seguros de Guatemala* (FESBES), Federation of Trade Unions of Bank and Insurance Employees of Guatemala, has received previous death threats. On one occasion, he received a call at his office asking if the flowers and memorial card for his funeral had arrived. At the beginning of December 1995, while he was in Costa Rica, his secretary, Verónica Vázquez, received a visit from two unidentified men in plain clothes asking for him.

That same week, one of the men returned, again asking for Reynaldo González.

On 20 January 1996 Reynaldo González was appointed one of the main spokespersons of the *Gran Alianza Sindical*, a trade union umbrella alliance made up of 11 different trade unions.

On 28 and 29 February 1996, Reynaldo González had two meetings with Lic. Mario René Cifuentes, Deputy Minister of the Interior, who reportedly promised to provide protection for Reynaldo's sister.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Workers and trade unionists seeking union recognition and improved working conditions in Guatemala have been subjected to an increase in violence against them, including extrajudicial execution, abduction, rape and beatings, as well as receiving threats to their lives. The recent wave of persecution frequently appears to be the work of gunmen hired by employers and factory owners in an attempt to destroy any or all attempts to unionize or vindicate their rightful labour claims. Amnesty International believes that the pattern and circumstances of these incidents, as well as the history of repression against trade unionists in Guatemala, indicate the participation of members of the security forces or those working with them.

Amnesty International is concerned that until effective government action is taken to ensure that members of the security forces and those working with them responsible for human rights violations against trade unionists and many others are brought to justice, trade unionists will continue to be a major target of human rights violations. (See Guatemala: Maquila workers among trade unionists targeted, AMR 34/28/95, November 1995)

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:**

- expressing grave concern at the abduction, torture and rape of Vilma Cristina González, the attempted abduction of Verónica Vázquez and serious concern at threats against the lives of Vilma, her brother and the rest of their family;
- urging the government to take immediate steps to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation to take place without delay and for those responsible to be brought to justice;

#### **APPEALS TO:**

##### 1) President of the Republic:

S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen  
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
 Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegrams: Presidente Arzú Irigoyen, Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Faxes: +502 2 515 667**

**Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President**

##### 2) Deputy Minister of Interior:

Lic. Mario René Cifuentes  
 Vice-Ministro de Gobernación,  
 Ministerio de Gobernación  
 Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegrams: Vice Ministro de Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Faxes: + 502 2 537 472**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

##### 3) Minister of Defence

Gral. Julio Arnoldo Balconi Turcios  
 Ministro de Defensa  
 Ministerio de Defensa

Palacio Nacional  
Guatemala, GUATEMALA  
**Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala**  
**Faxes: + 502 2 515368**  
**Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Fiscal General  
Lic. Ramses Cuestas Gómez  
Fiscal General de la Nación  
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Human Rights Procurator  
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Guatemala, GUATEMALA

and to diplomatic representatives of GUATEMALA accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 April 1996.