

PUBLIC

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8 September 2008

UA 248/08 Fear for safety

**GUATEMALA Yuri Melini (m), Director of Centre for Environmental, Social and Legal Action (Centro de Acción Legal, Ambiental y Social de Guatemala – CALAS), His family and colleagues in CALAS**

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Yuri Melini has been shot by masked men, apparently in connection with his work as Director of the Centre for Environmental, Social and Legal Action. Amnesty International believes he, his family and colleagues are in grave danger.

On 4 September at approximately 7:30 am Yuri Melini left his car and walked towards a house of a relative. A man standing near to him called his name and when he caught his attention fired at him four times. One bullet missed but three other hit him in the stomach, right knee and left leg.

CALAS has recently been involved in a number of high profile environmental issues, including legally challenging the law that permits opencast mining for gold and other metals, campaigning against contamination of water sources and occupation of land in nature reserves. The attack against Yuri Melini is believed to be linked to his role in CALAS and the work of the organization.

Other human rights defenders working on environmental concerns and focussing on similar issues to CALAS have also been threatened.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Guatemalan environmental activists have in the past been subject to attacks in order to stop them from carrying out their legitimate activities. They work to protect the environment and the human rights of indigenous and peasant communities whose livelihoods depend upon the environment.

On 10 January 2007, Carlos Albacete Rosales and Piedad Espinosa Albacete of the environmental organization Trópico Verde were shot at while they were in a taxi. They managed to escape unscathed. In January and February 2007, Flaviano Bianchini of the environmental organization MadreSelva Collective (*Colectivo MadreSelva*) was threatened with death and followed on several occasions (see *Persecution and Resistance: The experience of human rights defenders in Guatemala and Honduras*, AMR 02/001/2007, 08 August 2007).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Yuri Melini, his family and his colleagues in CALAS;
- urging the President and the Minister of the Interior to ensure that immediate measures are taken and maintained to guarantee the safety of Yuri Melini in strict accordance with his wishes;
- calling for the Attorney General to order an immediate, thorough and swift investigation into this incident, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities of the right of human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of Guatemala

Lic. Álvaro Colom

Casa Presidencial, 6ª Avenida, 4-18, Zona 1.

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax** +502 2221 4423

+502 2238 3579

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

Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office

Lic. José Amílcar Velásquez Zárate

Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público

8ª Avenida 10-67, Zona 1, Antiguo Edificio del Banco de los Trabajadores,

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax:** +502 2411 9124

**Salutation:** Dear Attorney General / Estimado Sr. Fiscal General

Minister of the Interior

Francisco José Jiménez Iruugaray

Ministro de Gobernación

6ª Avenida 13-71, Zona 1,

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax:** +502 2413 8658

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

**COPIES TO:**

Centro de Acción Legal – Ambiental y Social de Guatemala

Avenida Mariscal 13-59 Zona 11

Ciudad de 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 20 October 2008.