

PUBLIC

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UA 170/03

Death threats/fear for safety

13 June 2003

GUATEMALA

Pablo Rax Chub (m), ] journalists  
Ricardo Castro (m), ]  
Eswín Quiñonez (m), ]  
Their families

**Killed:** Raúl Rax Coc (m), aged 18

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Journalists Pablo Rax Chub and Ricardo Castro have recently been subjected to a series of death threats. Concerns for their safety have been heightened following the death of Rax Chub's eighteen year old cousin, Raúl Rax Coc on 6 June.

Ricardo Castro, who is a member of the *Instituto de Previsión Social del Periodista* (IPSP), Institute of Social Security for Journalists, has reportedly received numerous telephone and written death threats over the last few weeks. In one letter he was given details of his death, where he would be buried and told that no one would regret his death. On 30 May, he received a call in which he was told he would never return home. The threats reportedly started more than one and a half years ago when Ricardo Castro challenged the membership of the ex-head and current spokesperson of the Antigua *Policía Nacional Civil* (PNC) in the IPSP.

Pablo Rax Chub directs the news show "*La Noticia*" which is transmitted on *Radio Cobán*. His program has denounced the misuse of municipal funds by ruling party government officials and the discovery of ten secret runways, allegedly used for the illegal transport of drugs. He has recently carried out investigations into the proliferation of drug trafficking in Alta Verapaz department as well as evidence of corruption by government officials. This has resulted in numerous anonymous telephone calls from unidentified individuals, who have told him to stop carrying out his investigations. On 30 May, he was warned that he should be careful as he was being watched and that he should not write about nor say anything that was none of his business.

On 6 June, Pablo Rax Chub's eighteen year old cousin, Raúl Rax Coc, was knifed and later died in hospital. Whilst the incident may have been an unfortunate common crime, the possibility that it may be linked to Pablo Rax Chub's investigative work cannot be ruled out.

Approximately two weeks ago Eswín Quiñonez from the daily newspaper *La Hora* in Guatemala City was followed by a car, threatened and his photo taken. This was directly after he had reported on a group of residents who had presented a suit against a construction company for damages to the environment. The person who threatened him was reportedly from the construction company.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

On 21 May, Milton Oswaldo Matínez, a student radio presenter in Huehuetenango Department, in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala was kidnapped. His body was found four days later. Whilst the reason for his killing has not been established, it illustrates the climate of insecurity that journalists in Guatemala face as those reporting on human rights issues or government corruption, routinely face threats and harassment (See UA 66/03, AMR 34/014/2003, 7 March 2003).

Several journalists from *El Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala* (CERIGUA), Centre for Information on Guatemala, including CERIGUA's director, have also been subject to intimidation in recent months (See UA 97/03, AMR 34/023/2003, 11 April and UA 66/03, AMR 34/014/2003, 7 March 2003).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of journalists Pablo Rax Chub, Ricardo Castro, Eswín Quiñonez and their families, as well as all those involved in efforts to promote human rights and freedom of expression;
- urging the authorities to take immediate measures, in accordance with the wishes of those threatened, to guarantee the victims' safety;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the death threats and other attacks on journalists mentioned above, that the results be made public and those responsible brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Journalists and Trade Unionists

Lic. Marco Antonio Cortéz

Fiscal de delitos contra periodistas y sindicalistas

7ª. Avenida 11-20 Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 220 6873 (if someone answers please say "fax por favor")**

**Salutation: Dear Special Prosecutor/Señor Fiscal Especial**

Director General of the National Civil Police

Comisario General Raul Arquimedes Manchame Leiva

Director General de la Policia Nacional Civil

6a Avenida 13-71, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 251 9382**

**Salutation: Dear Director/Senor Director**

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Adolfo Reyes Calderón

Ministro de Gobernación

6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 362 0237**

**Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Sergio Morales

Procurador de Derechos Humanos

Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos

12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala 01001, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 238 1734**

Press Agency

CERIGUA

2a Calle 1-42, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 221 2521 (if someone answers please say "fax por favor")**

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 July 2003.