

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 34/057/2003

23 September 2003

UA 275/03 Death threats/fear for safety

GUATEMALA **Fernando López (m), director of the legal team of the *Centro para Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH), the Centre for Human Rights Legal Action
Other members of the CALDH legal team**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Fernando López, director of the legal team at the *Centro para Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH), Centre for Human Rights Legal Action, after he received a written death threat. Other members of the CALDH legal team may also be at risk.

At approximately 1.30pm on 22 September, an anonymous handwritten note was left inside Fernando López's car while he was buying medicine at a pharmacy close to the CALDH offices in zone 1 of Guatemala City. The note stated: "*Fernando López: te bigilamos (sic) desde el 80. Dejá de chingarnos o te quebramos el culo hijo de puta*". ("Fernando López: we have been watching you since the 1980s. Stop fucking around with us or else we'll break your arse you son of a bitch"). Fernando López, a long-standing human rights defender, has reported the threat to the Public Prosecutor's Office and the *Misión de Verificación de las Naciones Unidas en Guatemala* (MINUGUA), United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala, which is responsible for overseeing implementation of the Peace Accords.

On the same day, the *Asociación Justicia y Reconciliación* (AJR), Association of Justice and Reconciliation, an association of massacre survivors which works closely with CALDH, co-signed a press statement. The statement denounced the electioneering visit of Efraín Ríos Montt, the controversial presidential candidate of the ruling party, *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (FRG), Guatemalan Republican Front, to the town of Playa Grande, in the Ixcán region of El Quiché department, planned to take place the following day. Efraín Ríos Montt was the Guatemalan head of state from March 1982 to August 1983, during one of the most repressive periods of the Guatemalan military's counterinsurgency campaign which saw the massacre of tens of thousands of indigenous people in the Guatemalan countryside. Thousands of people from the Ixcán area were among those killed.

CALDH and the AJR have filed two legal suits against Efraín Ríos Montt and former members of his and a previous administration, in connection with the genocide of the early 1980s. CALDH's legal team, led by Fernando López, has been the driving force behind these legal suits and continues to prepare evidence to strengthen the suits. Amnesty International is concerned that the death threat against Fernando López may have been issued by or with the complicity of the official security forces, in an effort to intimidate Fernando López and his legal team into abandoning these legal suits.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CALDH is a human rights organization that was set up in 1990 in Washington, USA by an exiled Guatemalan human rights defender. The Guatemala office of CALDH opened in 1994. It has played a key role in preparing soundly researched legal suits aimed at bringing to justice those responsible for human rights violations. In the week before the threat was made, Frank La Rue, the director of CALDH, was announced as a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. This may have further angered the military and their supporters.

Members of CALDH have been targeted in the past as a result of their work to bring the perpetrators of human rights violations to justice (see UA 68/03, AMR 34/015/2003, 7 March 2003, and UA 256/00, AMR 34/34/00, 25 August 2000).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Fernando López and other members of the legal team of *Centro para Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH), after Fernando López received an anonymous written death threat on 22 September;
- calling for a prompt, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the death threat, for the results to be made public and for those responsible brought to justice;
- urging that, immediate measures be taken, in accordance with their wishes, to ensure the safety of Fernando López and the other members of CALDH's legal team;
- urging the Guatemalan government to implement the human rights related elements of the peace accords and Historical Clarification Commission and support the work of all human rights defenders;
- expressing your concern that until now there has been very little concrete progress in bringing to justice those responsible for the human rights violations of the armed conflict of the early 1980s;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a. Avenida "A" 4-41 Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 238 3579

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Adolfo Reyes Calderón
Ministro de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Telefax: + 502 362 0237 (if someone answers, say, "tono de fax por favour")
Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Attorney General

Carlos David de León Argueta
Fiscal General de la República
Fiscalía General del Ministerio Público
8a. Avenida 10-67 Tercer Nivel Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 221 2718
Email: fiscaldeleon@mp.lex.gob.gt
Salutation: Estimado Señor Fiscal General/Dear Attorney General

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
Salutation: Dear Procurator/Señor Procurador

Human Rights Organization

Centre for Human Rights Legal Action (CALDH)

9.a Ave. 2-59 Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: + 502 251 8163

Newspaper

Diario Prensa Libre
13 Calle 9-31, Zona I
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: + 502 251 8768/ 230 2193/ 230 2257

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 4 November 2003.