

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 37/02/98

UA 50/98

Fear for safety / extrajudicial killing

13 February 1998

**HONDURAS** Ernesto Sandoval Bustillo, Human rights defender  
Members of CODEH

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On 10 February 1998, Ernesto Sandoval Bustillo, a regional coordinator for the non-governmental *Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Honduras*, (CODEH), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Honduras and former Justice of the Peace, was shot dead by unidentified men as he walked to the CODEH offices in Santa Rosa de Cópán, Honduras. His killing has heightened fears for the safety of other CODEH members who have recently been subjected to surveillance in an apparent attempt to restrict the organizations' legitimate activities.

According to reports, Ernesto Sandoval Bustillo had received several death threats from "*Los justicieros de la noche*", Avengers of the night, a so-called "death squad" active in Santa Rosa de Cópán. This "death squad" issued death threats against 75 human rights activists, in a statement to the press on 26 December 1997. Despite appeals by NGO's to the authorities to determine who was responsible and bring them to justice, no investigation appears to have been initiated.

Members of CODEH have informed Amnesty International that Ernesto Sandoval had been active in leading some of the investigations into the killing of Cándido Amador Recinos (see below).

The *Dirección de Investigación Criminal*, (DIC), Directorate of Criminal Investigation have apparently opened an investigation into the killing of Ernesto Sandoval Bustillo.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cándido Amador Recinos, general Secretary of the General Council of Assessment for the Development of Indigenous Groups in Honduras and a member of *the Chortí*, (indigenous group) was killed on 12 April 1997. Those attempting to investigate his death have themselves been subjected to death threats, some have been killed (see UA 269/97, AMR 37/02/97, 12 August 1997).

Amnesty International believes that the increase in levels of intimidation against human rights defenders is directly related to their efforts to expose serious past and present human rights violations in Honduras and to pressurize the authorities into bringing the perpetrators to justice (see: *Continued struggle against impunity*; AMR 37/01/96, March 1996 and *The beginning of the end of impunity*; AMR 37/01/95, June 1995 as well as UA 97/97; AMR 37/01/97, 10 April 1997).

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

- welcoming the government's prompt response to the killing of Ernesto Sandoval Bustillo on 10 February 1998 by opening an investigation into his death;
- asking that the investigation be carried out thoroughly and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- requesting an investigation into serious allegations of the impunity enjoyed by the so-called "death squads" in Honduras;

- expressing serious concern for the safety of members of CODEH and urging the government to take immediate measures to guarantee their safety and asking to be kept informed of developments;
- expressing support for the work of CODEH on behalf of victims of human rights violations, emphasizing the need for appropriate protection to be given to all those involved.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) President

S..E. Carlos Roberto Flores  
 Presidente de la República de Honduras  
 Casa Presidencial, 6ª Avenida, 1ª Calle  
 Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Telegrams: Presidente, Tegucigalpa,  
 Honduras**

**Faxes: + 504 356949**

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

**Faxes: + 504 393687/394750**

**Telegrams: Fiscal General,  
 Tegucigalpa, Honduras**

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

2) Directorate of Criminal Investigation

Dr. Wilfredo Alvarado  
*Director de la Dirección de Investigación  
 Criminal (DIC)*

*7ª avenida, contigua Celocías Palermo  
 Comayagua, Tegucigalpa, Honduras*

**Faxes: +504 200554**

**Telegrams: Director de Investigación  
 Criminal, Tegucigalpa, Honduras**

**Salutation: Sr. Director/Dear Director**

3) President of the Supreme Court

*Lic. Oscar Amando Avila  
 Presidente de la Corte Suprema de Justicia  
 Palacio de la Justicia, Boulevard José Cecilio  
 del Valle, Tegucigalpa, Honduras*

**Faxes: + 504 336784**

**Telegrams: Presidente de la Corte  
 Suprema, Tegucigalpa, Honduras**

**Salutation: Presidente de la Corte/  
 Dear President of the Supreme Court**

4) Attorney General

Lic. Edmundo Orellana Mercado  
 Fiscal General. Fiscalía General de la  
 República  
 Ministerio Público, Edificio Castillo Poujol  
 4º Avd, Colonia Palmira, Boulevard  
 Morazán, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**COPIES TO:****Human rights organization**

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El Nuevo día. Lic. Amando Cerrato

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and to diplomatic representatives of Honduras accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 March 1998.