

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety/Death threats

12 February 2003

MEXICO

Miriam García (f)  
Blanca Guadalupe López (f)  
Sergio Dante Almaraz (m), lawyer

Dead: Víctor Javier García (m)  
Gustavo González Meza (m)

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Miriam García and Blanca Guadalupe Lopez, following a series of death threats and intimidation. The women are married to two men who were detained in November 2001 and reportedly tortured into confessing to the murder of eight young women in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state. Amnesty International is also concerned for the safety of surviving detainee, Victor Javier Garcia and his lawyer, Sergio Dante Almaraz.

On 8 February 2003 one of the detainees, Gustavo González Meza, husband of Blanca, was found dead in his cell in the Maximum Security Prison in Chihuahua. According to the prison authorities, he died as a result of a blood clot following a recent hernia operation. However, the results of the autopsy are not yet known and concern has been expressed that his death may be linked to the torture he suffered following his detention in 2001. The other detainee, Victor Javier Garcia, has also reportedly received death threats whilst in prison.

On 7 February 2003, Miriam García, wife of Victor Javier Garcia, was threatened by two unidentified men who broke into her house. She had been preparing to attend an event that had been organized by local Non-Government Organizations to protest against the killings and abductions of young women in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua. The two unidentified men reportedly threatened her saying: "*si te presentas al evento de la tarde, te mueres, porque eres tú o tu esposo, así que ya sabes*" (if you participate in the event this afternoon, you'll be killed since it's you or your husband, so now you know).

Ever since the two men were detained, their relatives and lawyers have repeatedly asserted the men's innocence have suffered a campaign of harassment and threats. On 2 February 2002, Mario Escobedo Anaya, the lawyer of Gustavo González Meza was shot dead by state judicial police. According to official reports, the police acted in self-defence after the lawyer fired at them first. This is reportedly contradicted by witnesses who said that the lawyer never fired at the police. On the same day, Miriam García received a threat by telephone allegedly saying that she would also die if she continued to speak out. Amnesty International has also received reports that the houses of the relatives of the detainees have continually been under surveillance by unknown persons. This is despite the Inter-American Human Commission on Rights issuing protection measures on behalf of Miriam Garcia, Blanca Guadalupe, the lawyer Sergio Dante Almaraz and another local human rights defender in September 2002. In November 2002, the relatives and lawyers of the detainees lodged a legal complaint to the state authorities against the detention and reported torture of the two men.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gustavo González Meza and Victor Javier Garcia were detained on 9 November 2001 in Ciudad Juarez by a group of unidentified persons wearing masks. The two men were taken to a house where they were allegedly tortured in order to confess to the murder of eight women whose bodies had been found two days before. The torture included electric shocks to their genitals and beatings and continued in the *Academia de Policía* (Police offices) in Ciudad Juarez. On 12 November 2001, Gustavo González Meza and Victor Javier García were charged with the killing and rape of the eight women.

There has been growing concern at the failure of the authorities to investigate effectively the cases of the murdered and abducted women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua. The authorities have repeatedly claimed to have solved these crimes but new cases have emerged. Families of the victims and national and international human rights organizations, have expressed concern at the numerous irregularities in the official investigations. They claim the murders are not effectively investigated with the perpetrators escaping justice, creating a climate of fear and suspicion for women in the state. On 7 February 2003, Amnesty International issued Urgent Action *AMR 41/005/2003* after two young women were reported missing in Ciudad Juárez.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Miriam García, Blanca Guadalupe López and the lawyer Sergio Dante Amaraz and calling on the authorities to guarantee their safety;
- expressing concern for the safety of the detainee Victor Javier García;
- calling on the authorities to investigate the threats and harassment, to make the results public, and to bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to carry out a prompt, full, effective and impartial investigation into the death of Gustavo González Meza;
- urging the authorities to carry out a prompt, full, effective and impartial investigation into allegations of torture against Gustavo González Meza and Victor Javier García, to make the results public, and to bring those responsible to justice.

**APPEALS TO**

Attorney General of the Republic

**General Rafael Marcial Macedo de la Concha**

**Procurador General de la Republica**

**Procuraduría General de la República**

Reforma Norte esq. Violeta 75

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Delegación Cuauhtémoc

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**Fax: +525 55 346 0983/0908 (if someone answers, ask for the fax: *pedir tono de fax, por favor*)**

**Salutation: Señor Procurador General / Dear Attorney General**

Governor of Chihuahua State

Lic. Patricio Martínez

Aldama 901

Colonia Centro

Chihuahua State, Mexico

**Fax: + 52 614 429 3300 ext 1141**

**Salutation: Dear Governor / Señor Gobernador**

Lic. Jesús José Solís

Procurador General de Justicia del Estado de Chihuahua

Calle Vicente Guerrero 616

Col Centro

Chihuahua State,

CP. 31000, Mexico

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**Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Señor Procurador**

**COPIES TO:**

Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos A.C. (CMDPDH)

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and to diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 March 2003.