

PUBLIC

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21 July 2006

UA 201/06 Fear for safety/Death threats

PARAGUAY **The family of Luis Martínez (m), murdered community leader
Zacarías Vega (m), community leader
Daniel Romero Bordón (m), community leader, and his family**

Community leaders Zacarías Vega and Luis Martínez were shot by members of an armed civilian patrol on 11 July. Luis Martínez was killed, and Zacarías Vega was wounded. According to reports, Zacarías Vega, community leader Daniel Romero Bordón and his family, and the family of Luis Martínez have since received death threats in an apparent attempt to stop them pursuing an investigation into the shooting.

On 11 July, Luis Martínez and Zacarías Vega, both community leaders from San José del Norte, San Pedro Department, northern Paraguay, were reportedly stopped as they were walking in San José del Norte, by members of the *Comisiones Vecinales de Seguridad*, (Neighbourhood Security Commission), an armed civilian patrol, who asked them where they were going. According to reports, the leader of the armed civilian patrol then started shooting at Luis Martínez. The rest of the patrol allegedly shot at both Luis Martínez and Zacarías Vega. Luis Martínez was killed after being shot more than 30 times. However, Zacarías Vega, though wounded, managed to escape. The killing of Luis Martínez appears to be linked to his work raising awareness of peasants' rights, campaigning against the excessive use of agricultural pesticides, and also his opposition to the use of arms by civilian patrols in the area.

The day after the shooting, Daniel Romero Bordón, another community leader in San José del Norte, and relatives of Luis Martínez were trying to find out more about the killing. According to reports, they received several threats, passed on by local children, warning them not to go ahead with a complaint about the shooting to the Paraguayan authorities, or else their lives and the lives of their families will be at risk. On 13 July, the wife of Luis Martínez and Daniel Romero Bordón filed a complaint before the District Attorney, calling for an investigation into the actions of the *Comisiones Vecinales de Seguridad*. The same day, the *Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos del Paraguay*, CODEHUPY, a non-governmental human rights organization, filed a *habeas corpus* petition requesting protection for Daniel Bordón and his family.

According to reports, the alleged perpetrators of the attack are free and continue to live in San José del Norte. Amnesty International is not aware of any action that has been taken by the authorities to ensure that Zacarías Vega, Daniel Romero Bordón, his relatives and Luis Martínez's relatives receive adequate protection; and that community leaders are able to continue their legitimate activities without fear for their lives or further threats. Daniel Romero Bordón, his family, the family of Luis Martínez and Zacarías Vega have left their community as they fear for their safety.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The creation of unarmed civilian patrols such as the *Comisiones Vecinales de Seguridad*, has been reportedly promoted by the Paraguayan Interior Ministry as a result of increasing crime in isolated areas in the country. According to reports, the Paraguayan authorities do not have means to control these civilian patrols and there have been reports of human right abuses committed by those patrols in areas where there is no presence of the Paraguayan security forces. In June 2006, a member of the Paraguayan Parliament submitted a bill before the Senate proposing a ban on armed civilian patrols.

Amnesty International has received reports of attacks, death threats, harassment and killings of members of peasant farmers' organizations, community leaders and indigenous groups by armed civilians. The information received indicates that these armed civilian groups are linked to landowners, private companies

or local politicians in the context of disputes over land and social issues (for further Information see UA 209/05, AMR 45/003/2005, 11 August 2005).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Zacarías Vega, Luis Martínez' relatives, Daniel Romero Bordón and his relatives;
- expressing concern that they have all received death threats, which appear to be an attempt to intimidate them into ceasing their pursuit of an investigation into the shooting of Luis Martinez and Zacarías Vega;
- urging the authorities to guarantee their safety in accordance with their wishes;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the killing of Luis Martinez and the death threats against those seeking justice for his death, for the results to be made public and for those found responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Interior Minister

Sr. Rogelio Raimundo Benitez Vargas
Ministerio del Interior
Chile esq. Manduvira
Asunción, Paraguay

Fax: +595 21 450 027 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Minister of Justice

Dr. Derlis Céspedes
Ministerio de Justicia y Trabajo
Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia y Estados Unidos
Asunción, Paraguay

Fax: +595 21 208 469 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Attorney General

Rubén Candia Amarilla
Fiscal General del Estado
Procuraduría General de la República
San José 156 c/ Mcal. Lopez
Asunción, Paraguay

Fax: + 595 21 454 603 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Sr. Fiscal General

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sra. Leila Rachid de Cowles
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Palma y 14 de mayo
Asunción, Paraguay

Fax: +595 21 490 676 (If someone answers, please ask: "Tono de fax, por favor")

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señora Ministra

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Organization

Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos del Paraguay - CODEHUPY
París 1031 c/ Colón, Asunción, Paraguay

Email: codehupy@codehupy.org

and to diplomatic representatives of Paraguay accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 September 2006.