

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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PLEASE ORGANIZE UP TO 20 APPEALS PER SECTION

UA 113/91

Death Threats/Attacks

27 March 1991

PARAGUAY: Pedro Darío PORTILLO
Rodolfo Manuel ASERETTO
Dr Francisco de VARGAS

Amnesty International is concerned about reported death threats received by two human rights lawyers, apparently as a result of their representation of relatives of victims of human rights violations under the former government of General Alfredo Stroessner.

In mid-March Pedro Darío Portillo and Rodolfo Manuel Aseretto, both lawyers with the Inter-Church Committee human rights organization, Comité de Iglesias para Ayudas de Emergencia (CIPAE), formally denounced to the Paraguayan Attorney General that they had received repeated threats against their lives through anonymous telephone calls and written messages. In their written complaints the lawyers stated their belief that the threats were related to their legal activities in judicial investigations of past human rights violations. Both Pedro Portillo and Rodolfo Aseretto are legally representing victims and relatives of victims of human rights violations including torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution of political prisoners under the former government. Many of these cases, in which former government officials are implicated, are nearing the sentencing stage (plenario). In some cases the prosecutor has recommended substantial prison terms for former senior members of the police force. In a statement of support for its lawyers, CIPAE denounced the repeated threats alleging that they constituted an attempt to delay the conclusion of the trials.

Amnesty International is also concerned about a recent attack on the home of a former CIPAE lawyer, Francisco de Vargas, now vice-president of the Human Rights Commission of the Congressional Chamber of Deputies, and deputy for the opposition Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico, Authentic Liberal Radical Party. According to reports, at about 3am on 10 March 1991, unidentified persons opened fire on Francisco de Vargas' home. This incident has also been denounced to the Attorney General.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Only weeks after General Andrés Rodríguez came to power following a coup d'etat in February 1989, numerous reports of human rights violations under the previous government of General Alfredo Stroessner appeared virtually daily in the press.

Dozens of denunciations of illegal detention, torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution of political prisoners during the 1960s and 1970s led to criminal investigations by judicial authorities. Several senior members of the former administration, including former president General Alfredo Stroessner, Interior Minister Sabino Montanaro and police chiefs Pastor Milciades Coronel and General Brítez Borges, have been implicated in serious human rights violations and are currently facing trial.

However, many judicial inquiries into past human rights violations have suffered prolonged delays and judges have reported apparent attempts to impede the progress of investigations.

Amnesty International believes that it is a principal element in the protection of human rights that those responsible for past violations of such rights should be brought to justice.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the death threats against Pedro Darío Portillo and Rodolfo Manuel Aseretto and at the attack on the home of Dr Francisco de Vargas;
- asking whether a judicial investigation has been opened into the complaints of threats and the attack on the human rights lawyers, and urging that the results of the investigation be made public;
- requesting that steps be taken to ensure the safety of all those working in defence of human rights in Paraguay.

APPEALS TO:

Dr. Luis Emilio Escobar Faella
Fiscal General del Estado
Fiscalía General del Estado
Asunción, PARAGUAY

Telegrams: Fiscal Gral Escobar, Asuncion, Paraguay
Telexes: 111 RELACIONES PY (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

General Andrés Rodríguez
Exmo. Sr. Presidente de la República del Paraguay
Palacio de Gobierno
Asunción, PARAGUAY

Telegrams: Presidente Rodríguez, Asunción, Paraguay
Telexes: 411 SUBINFOR PY

COPIES TO:

Comité de Iglesias para Ayudas de Emergencia
Gral. Díaz 429
Asunción
PARAGUAY

and to diplomatic representatives of Paraguay in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 May 1991.