

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety / Death threats

8 July 1998

VENEZUELA Alcira Benítez (f)
Rosario Estrada (f), sister of above
Alicia Guerrero

Sergio Salvador, human rights worker
Maridex Valera, human rights worker
Teolindo Rojas, human rights worker
and human rights volunteers

Killed: Nilson Enrique Benítez, taxi driver, son of Alcira
Benítez
José Lino Pirela, blacksmith
Omar Montiel

There are fears for the safety of the above-named; all of them are being intimidated and harassed and some have received anonymous threats.

The harassment and threats follow the reported extrajudicial execution of Nilson Enrique Benítez, José Lino Pirela and Omar Montiel by the *Policía Técnica Judicial* (PTJ) Criminal Investigations Police on 5 June 1998.

Those being targeted are the relatives of the three victims, eye witnesses to the killings and volunteer members of the human rights organization the *Red de Apoyo por la Justicia y la Paz*, Support Network for Justice and Peace.

Alcira Benítez, mother of Nilson Enrique Benítez, who publicly denounced the killings in a press conference on 25 June, has reportedly received several telephone calls warning her that she would be killed if she continued to denounce the killings. Her sister, Rosario Estrada, has also received three anonymous calls in the middle of the night. Other residents of the neighbourhood in which the incident occurred have reported intimidation in the form of daily patrols by the PTJ who have been keeping under surveillance individuals who might have witnessed the incident. On 25 June, Sergio Salvador, a member of the *Red de Apoyo*, Alcira Benítez and Alicia Guerrero, relatives who were visiting the area where the killings occurred, were followed closely for half an hour by a white van with darkened windows.

Other members of the *Red de Apoyo por la Justicia y la Paz*, including Maridex Valera and Teolindo Rojas, have also received several anonymous telephone calls at their office which they believe are linked to the intimidation being directed at relatives of the victims.

The killings occurred in the town of Maracaibo, Zulia State, when the three men were dragged from their car by members of a police patrol who had been following them, and shot at point-blank range. Omar Montiel was allegedly being sought by police in connection with an alleged crime. Witnesses have denied police reports that the men were killed during an armed confrontation with the police.

A complaint has been presented to the Attorney General's Office.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over the years, Amnesty International has received reports of many cases of individuals killed by the security forces and military personnel in

circumstances suggesting that firearms were used unnecessarily or with the deliberate intention of killing or causing serious injury. These incidents are rarely fully investigated and in very few cases have those responsible been brought to justice.

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

- expressing serious concern at the deaths of Nilson Enrique Benítez, José Lino Pirela and Omar Montiel on 5 June 1998 in circumstances that strongly suggest they were the victims of extrajudicial executions;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the killings to be carried out without delay and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern at the death threats and harassment of those involved in the case and calling for guarantees for their safety;
- urging that the government carry out an immediate investigation and for those responsible to be brought to justice;

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Hilarión Cardoza
Ministro de Justicia
Ministerio de Justicia
Torre Norte, piso 25
Centro Simón Bolívar
Caracas, Venezuela

Telegrams: Ministro Justicia, Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: + 582 483 75 15

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Attorney General

Dr. Iván Darío Badell González
Fiscal General de la República
Manduca a Ferrenquín
La Candelaria
Caracas, Venezuela

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: + 582 564 74 61

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

Director of the PTJ

Comisario José Ramón Lazo Ricardi
Director del Cuerpo Técnico de Policía Judicial
Esquina de No. Pastor
a Puente Victoria
Ed. Parque Carabobo PB
Caracas, Venezuela

Telegrams: Director PTJ, Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: + 582 574 09 72

Salutation: Sr. Director / Dear Director

President of the National Human Rights Commission

Dr. José Guillermo Andueza
Presidente de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos
Palacio de Miraflores
Edificio Bicentenario, Nivel Plaza, Of. 206

Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: + 582 806 39 42

Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

COPIES TO:

Sres.

Red de Apoyo por la Justicia y la Paz

Apartado Postal 17.476

Parque Central

Caracas 1015-A

Venezuela

and to diplomatic representatives of Venezuela accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 19 August 1998.