

MEXICO

Ruth Yudit Ortega Orozco was abducted in Mexico City by two unidentified men on 4 November 1996. The men put a gun into her mouth, tied her hands and feet and gagged her. She was released a few hours later. The men responsible for this and previous attacks are believed to be connected to the Mexican security forces.

Ruth Yudit Ortega, a student leader and human rights activist, has been the target of a systematic campaign of harassment, abduction and torture, apparently because of her political activities. Less than a month before the November attack, she was abducted and taken to a secret detention centre where she was beaten and given electric shocks during interrogation about her political activities. Her interrogators also made death threats against her and her family, including her two sisters, aged four and eight. She was released later the same day.

She has continued to receive threats. In January she was told, "the Tabasco street-sweepers didn't die, but you will" – Ruth Yudit Ortega had supported the street cleaners from Tabasco who had gone on hunger-strike to protest at their appalling working conditions.

Despite her complaints to governmental agencies, the authorities have been reluctant to offer her protection. She had previously turned down an offer of police protection, fearing that those responsible for terrorizing her were in fact linked to the police force.

+Please write, urging that the safety of Ruth Yudit Ortega Orozco be guaranteed, that an independent and impartial investigation be immediately launched into her abduction, torture and harassment, and that those responsible be brought to justice, to: President of Mexico/ Lic. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León/ Palacio Nacional/ 06067 Mexico D.F./ Mexico.

IRAN

Dhabihullah Mahrami and Musa Talibi are feared to be at risk of imminent execution after the Supreme Court reportedly confirmed the death sentences against them.

Both men are prisoners of conscience, sentenced to death for reverting to the Baha'i religion after converting to Islam.

Dhabihullah Mahrami was originally sentenced to death for apostasy in January 1996 by a Revolutionary Court. The sentence was later overturned by the Supreme Court, which referred his case back to a lower court. However, reports indicate that he has been told that the death sentence against him has been confirmed by the Supreme Court.

Musa Talibi was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in October 1994. He appealed and was retried in February 1995 when his sentence was reduced to 18 months. However, the prosecution objected to the lighter sentence, apparently on the grounds that he was an apostate and that this had not been taken into account at the trial. He was tried again in July 1996 and sentenced to death. His lawyer lodged an appeal, but Musa Talibi has reportedly been told that the death sentence against him has been confirmed.

Baha'is in Iran are systematically persecuted. At least 201 Baha'is have been executed, most in the 1980s, apparently for their religious beliefs or activities.

+Please write, urging the Iranian authorities to lift the death sentence against Dhabihullah Mahrami and Musa Talibi; asking that they be released immediately and unconditionally as prisoners of conscience; and calling on the authorities to ensure that no one in the future is sentenced to a prison term or to death solely for the peaceful expression of their religious beliefs; to: Leader of the Islamic Republic/ His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei/ The Presidency/ Palestine Avenue/ Azerbaijan Intersection/ Tehran/ Islamic Republic of Iran. Telegrams: Ayatollah Khamenei, Tehran, Iran.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Theodore Miriung was shot dead on 12 October 1996 while visiting his wife's village of Kapana, near Konga in southwest Bougainville. Members of the government-backed Resistance Forces and of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) have been implicated in the killing.

Theodore Miriung, the former premier of the Bougainville Transitional Government, had been a supporter of secession for Bougainville. But since 1994, he had become increasingly involved in attempts to establish peace in the area where armed separatists have been waging a violent campaign for independence for Bougainville. However, the PNGDF had continued to impose restriction on his movements because of his suspected secessionist sympathies.

The preliminary findings of a coroner's inquiry stated that a group of between eight and 10 men, including PNGDF soldiers and members of the Resistance Forces, were involved in the killing. However, the findings were not officially made public and no member of the PNGDF has been suspended or charged in connection with Theodore Miriung's death.

The inquiry itself was hampered by intimidation of witnesses and investigators by members of the PNGDF and Resistance Forces; the judge conducting the inquiry was unable to travel to Bougainville because of fears for his safety; police attempting to interview witnesses were threatened and forced to leave the area; and police stated that witnesses "could not speak openly for fear of their lives".

Amnesty International is concerned that the government has fallen short of its obligations under international human rights standards to fully and impartially investigate the death of Theodore Miriung.

+Please write, welcoming the inquiry into the death of Theodore Miriung, but urging the government to take immediate action to protect witnesses; to ensure that those investigating the killing are able to do so in safety; and that immediate steps are taken to bring to justice those found responsible for the killing; to:

Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea/ The Rt. Hon. Sir Julius Chan GCMG, KBE, MP/ Office of the Prime Minister/ PO Box 6605/ Boroko, NCD/ Papua New Guinea. Fax: +675 327 6540/327 6629