

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Guatemala: Hostages must be immediately released.

Amnesty International condemns the hostage taking of four Prensa Libre journalists, Fredy López, Emerson Díaz, Mario Linares and Alberto Ramírez, and one staff member of the *Secretaría de Asuntos Administrativos de Seguridad* (SAAS), Hilario Guerra, by former members of the *Patrullas de Defensa Civil*, (PAC) Civil Defence Patrols, on 26 October in La Libertad, some 300 kilometres north-east of the capital Guatemala City. The organisation also condemns the reported beating of Fredy López whilst in the custody of the former civil patrollers.

Amnesty International deplores the use of such methods to press local authorities to fulfil the former patrollers' demands for compensation for their services as military adjuncts during the conflict. Amnesty International urges the Guatemalan government to do its utmost to ensure the physical integrity of the journalists and government official, and to ensure the peaceful resolution of this deeply disturbing incident. Amnesty International also urges the government to make public its acknowledgement of and support for the important role played by journalists as they carry out their professional responsibilities.

Amnesty International also takes this opportunity to reiterate its concerns regarding the compensation of members of the ex PAC for their service as civilian militias during Guatemala's long-term civil conflict. Amnesty International is also concerned not only at the impunity these civilian militias continue to enjoy for the abuses they committed during the internal armed conflict, but that the ex patrollers' campaign for compensation has served to re-mobilise these groups, which were to have been abolished under the Peace Accords, but which have gone on to commit new violations.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to ensure that the provisions of the Peace Accords relevant to these groups are respected and that those responsible for new abuses attributed to the patrols, including this latest hostage-taking incident are identified and brought to justice. Amnesty International also reiterates the importance of compensating all victims of human rights abuses during the conflict years and the vital importance of bringing all perpetrators of human rights violations to justice.

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