

UA 129/02

Death thro**GUATEMALA Rigoberto Pérez Garrido (m), priest**

Parish priest Rigoberto Pérez Garrido has reportedly received a series of anonymous telephone death threats and Amnesty International is concerned for his safety.

On 23 April, he received an anonymous call to his home in which he was warned, "*Hijo de la gran puta, si seguís investigando, te vas a morir*" (you son of a bitch, if you carry on investigating, I'm going to kill you).

Pérez Garrido lives in Quiché Department, in the mainly indigenous town of Nebaj. Quiché was one of the departments that suffered most during Guatemala's 30-year civil conflict, suffering 344 of the total 699 massacres. The army's scorched earth counter-insurgency campaign systematically targeted indigenous people, intending to annihilate the guerrillas' social base in rural Mayan communities. The United Nation's sponsored Truth Commission determined that Nebaj was one of the four areas in Guatemala that genocide had taken place.

The victims of the massacres at Nebaj and elsewhere in Guatemala were buried in mass graves. Forensic scientists are now exhuming these graves, providing crucial evidence against government officials involved in the massacres. Pérez Garrido has actively supported exhumations in his parish, and allowed scientists to store their exhumation equipment in his church. Church figures believe that the threats are linked to this.

Pérez Garrido also supported the Church's inquiry into the abuses of the conflict years, known as "Remhi". The driving force behind the Remhi investigation was Bishop Juan Gerardi. In April 1998 he presented the report, which found that the security forces were responsible for the overwhelming majority of the human rights abuses committed during the conflict. Two days later he was found clubbed to death.

The threats may also be related to Rigoberto Pérez Garrido's efforts to push for an investigation into the fire started in his parish church on 21 February, allegedly deliberately. Information on 35 massacres recorded by the Catholic church between 1980 and 1983 in the Nebaj area also stored in the church was destroyed in the fire (see UA 68/02, AMR 34/014/2002, 5 March and Further information, AMR 34/25/2002, 13 March 2002). Amnesty International fears that the fire, and now the telephone threats, are intended to intimidate Pérez Garrido, to stop him supporting the exhumations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The threats against Pérez come in the wake of similar intimidation aimed at individuals involved in exhumations. Forensic scientists from the *Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala* (FAFG), Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology, were forced to abandon their work by anonymous threatening phone calls (see UA 68/02, AMR 34/014/2002, 5 March 2002 and follow-up, AMR 34/021/2002, 26 March 2002). They resumed work on 9 April, although the calls are continuing.

The remains of 106 massacre victims exhumed by FAFG in the area surrounding Zacualpa, also in el Quiché department, were formally buried on 18 and 19 April.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of parish priest Rigoberto Pérez Garrido, who has recently received a series of anonymous threatening phone calls;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that he and others involved in the exhumation of mass graves will be protected;
- urging the authorities to immediately investigate the threats and intimidation, making the results public and bringing those responsible to justice;
- reminding the authorities of their obligation to fulfill the recommendations made by the Historical Clarification Commission, which identified exhumations as an important step towards justice and national reconciliation, and called for a government exhumation programme;
- urging the authorities to set up a government exhumation programme.

APPEALS TO:

Vice-president of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Juan Francisco Reyes López

6^a Avenida 'A' 4-18

Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams:Vicepresidente de la República, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax:+ 502 239 0090

Salutation: Dear vice-president/Señor Vicepresidente

Minister of the Interior

Eduardo Arévalo Lacs

Ministro de Gobernación

Ministerio de Gobernación

6^a Avenida 4-64, Zona 4

Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

Telegrams:Ministro de Gobernación, Ciudad de Guatemala , Guatemala

Fax:+ 502 362 0239/ 362 0237

Email: monica24@intelnet.net.gt

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Public Prosecutor's Office

Ministerio Público

8a. Av. 10-67, zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax:+ 502 220 3908

Salutation:Dear Sir/Estimado Señor

Peace Secretary

Sr. Gabriel Aguilera

Secretario de la Paz

5a Calle 4-33, Zona 1

Edificio Rabi, 4 Nivel

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax:+ 502 230 1731

Salutation:Dear Secretary/Señor Secretario

COPIES TO:

Human Rights organisation

Oficina de Derechos Humanos del

Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG)
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and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 June 2002.