

**PUBLIC**  
**UA 363/02**

**Fear For Safety**

**AI Index: AMR 34/085/2002**

**16 December 2002**

**GUATEMALA Amílcar Méndez (m), Human rights activist and his family.**

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of human rights activist Amílcar Méndez and his family. He was fired upon and robbed by an unidentified gunman on 12 December, near his home in Mixco, Guatemala City. He was not injured in the attack, but had a number of items stolen including personal documents, cash and a mobile phone.

Amílcar Méndez, founder of one of Guatemala's first human and indigenous rights organisations *El Consejo de Comunidades Etnicas, Runujel Junam* (CERJ), The Council of Ethnic Communities, *Runujel Junam* ('We are all equal') and his family remain deeply shocked and afraid following the attack.

Due to his work with CERJ, which has focused mainly on demilitarization and the human rights of indigenous peoples, Amílcar Méndez and his family has been the target of numerous attacks and threats dating back to 1988. They were forced to seek temporary asylum abroad on several occasions (see UA 128/91, AMR 34/13/91, 18 April 1991; UA 289/91, AMR 34/40/91, 28 August 1991; fu UA 30/95, AMR 34/11/96, 12 April 1996). However, this is the first direct threat on Amílcar Méndez's life in recent years. Increasingly it has become a pattern in Guatemala for attacks on human rights defenders to be carried out in such a way that they appear as common crime. However, Amnesty International fears that the motive for the attack may be his long term involvement in human rights work, particularly his prominent role in efforts to locate a missing indigenous lawyer, Antonio Pop Caal, who disappeared from his home in Cobán, Alta Verapaz Department two months ago, and whose whereabouts remain unknown.

Since the mid-1980s, Amílcar Méndez has been one of the key figures in the human rights movement in Guatemala and the recipient of a number of international human rights prizes. In 1996, he was elected to Congress as representative for the popular leftist party, *El Frente Democrático Nueva Guatemala* (FDNG), The New Guatemalan Democratic Front, where he served until 2000.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In recent years, the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders in Guatemala has escalated dramatically, intensifying since February with a wave of attacks against human rights and indigenous rights activists. Amnesty International is concerned that the Guatemalan authorities are failing to take demonstrable steps to protect human rights defenders, commitments to which they are bound under the Peace Accords signed in 1996 and national and international law.

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

- urging the authorities to offer immediate protection to Amílcar Méndez and his family;
- calling on the authorities to carry out an immediate, exhaustive and impartial investigation into this incident, bringing those responsible to justice and making the results public;
- insisting that the failure to clarify this grave incident can only be seen by the international community as evidence of the Guatemalan authorities' unwillingness or inability to deliver on their frequently repeated promises to the international community to protect human rights defenders and take concrete steps to ensure a return to the rule of law.

**APPEALS TO:**

**President of the Republic of Guatemala**

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera

Presidente de la República de Guatemala

6a. Avenida "A" 4-41, Zona 1, Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegram:** **Presidente de la República de Guatemala, Guatemala City, Guatemala**

**Fax:** **+ 502 238 3579**

**Salutation:** **Dear Señor President/Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente**

**Director General of the National Civil Police**

Comisario General Raúl Arquímedes Manchamé Leiva

Director General de la Policía Nacional Civil

6a Avenida 13-71, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegram:** **Director General de la Policía, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Fax:** **+ 502 251 9382**

**Salutation:** **Dear Director/Señor Director**

**Secretary of Strategic Analysis**

Secretario de Análisis Estratégico

Secretaría de Análisis Estratégico

6a Avenida 'A' 3-53, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegram:** **Secretario de Análisis Estratégico, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Fax:** **+ 502 232 2886**

**Salutation:** **Dear Secretary/Señor Secretario**

**Attorney General**

Lic. Carlos David de León Argueta

Fiscal General de la República

Fiscalía General del Ministerio Público

8a. Avenida 10-57, Tercer nivel

Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax:** **+ 502 221 2718**

**Salutation:** **Dear Attorney General/Señor Fiscal General**

**COPIES TO:**

**Human Rights Procurator**

Lic. Sergio Morales

Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos

12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1

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**Special Prosecutor on human rights defenders**

Lica. Tatiana Morales

Fiscalía de hechos delictivos contra miembros o grupos de Derechos Humanos y Derechos Indígenas

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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 27 January 2003.