

**GUATEMALA** Members of NGOs working for indigenous rights

**Killed: José Alfredo Quino  
María Elena Mejía**

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The director and secretary of an organisation working for indigenous rights were murdered on 21 July. Amnesty International fears that other members of organisations working for the social welfare of indigenous communities are in grave danger.

José Alfredo Quino and María Elena Mejía were setting off for work from San Andrés Semetabaj, in Sololá, when they were attacked. A group of 10 hooded men armed with Israeli-made Galil assault rifles (commonly used by army officers during the civil war), stopped their car and ordered them to get out. The men shot them in the head, took some of their belongings, split up into two groups and escaped on foot.

José Alfredo Quino and María Elena Mejía were director and secretary of CORCI, an organisation that deals with land disputes within indigenous communities in the Sololá region. They both also worked for the *Comité Campesino del Altiplano* (CCDA), Altiplano Farmers' Committee, which campaigns for the rights of farming communities, mediating in land disputes and campaigning for better pay for peasant farmers.

José Alfredo Quino was also the director of the *Fundación para la Educación y Desarrollo Comunitario* (FUNDACEDCO), Foundation for the Education and the Development of the Community, which is affiliated to CONGCOOP, an umbrella organisation of groups that supports peasant organizations, and helps with the resettlement of communities displaced in the civil war.

Local sources are convinced that this attack was not just a simple robbery but a well-planned extrajudicial execution. They are confident that José Alfredo Quino and María Elena Mejía were murdered because of their work for farming communities.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

These killings come at a time of renewed threats and harassment of human rights workers, journalists and other activists. Several NGO workers received death threats in May (see UA 142/00, AMR 34/18/00, 30 May). A trade union leader has been murdered and an academic has "disappeared" (See UA 93/00, AMR 34/13/00, 25 April, and follow-up).

Local human rights groups fear that this may represent a deliberate strategy intended to intimidate those who campaign for the defence of human rights in Guatemala into giving up their work.

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

- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the murders of José Alfredo Quino and María Elena Mejía, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective measures to ensure the safety of all members of CONGCOOP, CORCI and the CCDA;

- expressing concern for the safety of all those involved in efforts to protect human rights, in particular those who have recently been threatened or intimidated.

**APPEALS TO:**

Attorney General

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

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Guillermo Ruiz Wong  
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**Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister**

Minister of Defence

Col. Juan de Dios Estrada V.  
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**Salutation: Señor Ministro/Dear Minister**

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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 6 September 2000.