

UA 313/99

Fear for**GUATEMALANery Rodenas Paredes, director of the Archbishop's Human Rights Office of Guatemala.**

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On 29 November 1999, Nery Rodenas Paredes, director of the *Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala* (ODHAG), Archbishop's Human Rights Office of Guatemala, received a telephone call telling him that he would die. Amnesty International is very concerned for his safety and the safety of all those involved with the Guatemalan church's 1998 Recuperation of the Historical Memory (REMHI), report (see below) as well as all those involved in the investigation into the murder of Bishop Juan José Gerardi, the former coordinator of ODHAG (see below).

The death threat to Nery Rodenas Paredes came the same day a Guatemalan newspaper published an interview with one of the people involved in the ODHAG investigation into Bishop Gerardi's murder. In the article, the interviewee accused officials from the *Estado Mayor Presidencial*, office of the Presidential Chief of Staff, of being involved.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Bishop Gerardi, Auxiliary Bishop of Guatemala and Coordinator of the ODHAG, was murdered in April 1998, two days after he had presided over the presentation to the Guatemalan people of the church's REMHI report into the atrocities carried out over more than three decades of civil conflict in the country. This comprehensive report concluded that the security forces were responsible for the majority of the tens of thousands of human rights violations perpetrated against non-combatants during the conflict. Bishop Gerardi had been a moving force behind the project.

In April 1999, three gunmen forced their way into the house of Ronalht Ochaeta, the then director of the ODHAG. After threatening a servant and holding a gun to the head of Ochaeta's four-year-old son, they departed, leaving behind a box disguised as a bomb but which contained a piece of brick. This was an apparent allusion to the cement block which was used to batter Bishop Gerardi to death almost a year earlier (see UA 139/98, AMR 34/16/98, 1 May 1998 and follow up).

- on 7 October 1999, the prosecutor investigating the murder of Bishop Juan José Gerardi, Calvin Galindo, resigned and fled to the United States to seek political asylum after repeatedly being threatened with death;
- in March, after only a month, the second judge appointed to the case resigned and fled to Canada after also being threatened with death;
- international pressure forces the first judge and prosecutor overseeing the case to resign after complaints that they ignored evidence of military involvement in the murder;
- in February, a key witness in the murder case, taxi driver Diego Méndez, who reported seeing a military vehicle near Gerardi's home at the time of the murder, flees to Canada after being abducted and being threatened with death;
- in August, a former member of the presidential guard, Sergeant Jorge Aguilar, fled to Canada two days after accusing colleagues of involvement in the murder.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Nery Rodenas Paredes who received a telephone death threat on 29 November 1999;

- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the reported death threats against him and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take effective measures to ensure the safety of all those involved in the investigation into the murder of Bishop Gerardi and to bring to justice anyone found to have been involved in his murder, regardless of their position;
- expressing concern for the safety of all those involved with the Guatemalan church's 1998 REMHI report and asking the authorities to ensure their safety;
- calling on the government to honour the commitments of the Peace Accords and the same recommendation made by the Historical Clarification Commission report, to dismantle the *Estado Mayor Presidencial*, office of the Presidential Chief of Staff structures.

**APPEALS TO:**President of the Republic of Guatemala

S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen, Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
Palacio Nacional, 6ª Calle, entre 6ª y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegrams: Presidente, Palacio Nacional, Guatemala.**

**Faxes: + 502 221 4425**

**E-mails: alvaroarzu@guate.net; alvaroarzu@guateconnect.com**

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

Minister of Defence

Gral. Marco Tulio Espinosa Contreras, Ministro de Defensa Nacional  
Ministerio de Defensa, Avenida Reforma 2-43, Zona 10  
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala.**

**Faxes: + 502 360 9909**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister**

Attorney General

Lic. Adolfo González Rodas, Fiscal General de la República  
Ministerio Público, 6ª Avenida 3-11, Zona 4  
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegrams: Fiscal General, Guatemala, Guatemala.**

**Faxes: + 502 362 7223**

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

**COPIES TO:**Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric of Guatemala

Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG)  
6a Calle 7-70, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Faxes: + 502 232 8384; E-mails: ddhh@odhag.org.gt**

Daily Newspaper

Diario Prensa Libre, 13 Calle 9-31, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Faxes: + 502 251 8768; E-mails: mediosselectronicos@prensalibre.com.gt**

Newspaper

CERIGUA, 2a calle 1-42, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala. Guatemala

**Tel/Faxes: + 502 238 1456/ 221 2521**

**e-mails: [cerigua@guate.net](mailto:cerigua@guate.net)**

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 17 January 2000.