

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 34/19/97

UA 137/97

Fear for safety

8 May 1997

GUATEMALA **María Francisca Ventura Sican (f), human rights defender, and her six sons**

In the last few days María Francisca Ventura Sican and her family have been subjected to acts of intimidation by individuals presumed to be members of the security forces or those acting on their behalf. María Francisca Ventura Sican believes that she is being actually targeted because she gave testimony to an Amnesty International delegation visiting Guatemala in April 1997. The organization is seriously concerned for her safety and that of her family.

On 22 April, at 6.30pm, a grey car with tinted windows parked outside her house near Antigua, in Sacatepéquez Department. The car remained in front of her house for five minutes and then left and returned 10 minutes later. When two relatives of María Francisca Ventura Sican went outside the house to take down the car registration number, the car immediately left.

On 28 April, at 8.30pm, María Francisca Ventura left her house with one of her sons. Ten minutes later two men went into the house and asked one of her other sons the exact name of her mother and their telephone number. The two men left the house afterwards saying that they would return later.

On 29 April, at 11pm, a man telephoned one of María Francisca Ventura's neighbours asking her to contact María Francisca Ventura. The caller said that María Francisca Ventura should leave the house to pick up some information that he, the caller, would bring her.

On 4 May, as María Francisca Ventura was having lunch with her nephew in Alotenango, near Antigua, two men knocked at the door and asked for her and said that they wanted to have a look at the house. The men were identified by María Francisca Ventura's relatives as the same men who twice before had come to the house asking about María Francisca Ventura's whereabouts.

María Francisca Ventura is working with other human rights defenders to bring to justice those responsible for the death of her husband (see below). She told Amnesty International in April that, although she wanted the threats to end, she was not going to give up until she saw those responsible in prison.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

María Francisca Ventura is the widow of evangelical pastor Manuel Saquic Vásquez, whose body was found in an unmarked grave on 7 July 1995. He was coordinator of a Kaqchikel Maya Human Rights Committee in Panajabal, Chimaltenango Department and had "disappeared" after being abducted by alleged members of the security forces on 23 June 1995. Residents of Panajabal believe that Manuel Saquic was killed in reprisal for his human rights work and because he was also the sole witness to the abduction by security forces of another member of the Human Rights Committee in Panajabal.

Those working on the case of Manuel Saquic have received a number of death threats in the past. Not only have María Francisca Ventura's relatives been harassed by individuals, sometimes by soldiers in uniform, but threats have also been delivered through her market stall in Antigua, where María Francisca Ventura sells textiles.

So far those responsible for the killing of her husband and the threats against her, her family and those working on Manuel Saquic's case, have not been brought to justice.

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

- expressing serious concern about the harassment and intimidation against María Francisca Ventura and her family and indicating that she has been targeted since giving testimony to an Amnesty International delegation visiting the country in April 1997;
- expressing concern for the safety of María Francisca Ventura and her six sons and calling on the authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee their safety;
- calling on the authorities to conduct full and prompt investigations into the intimidation, harassment and previous death threats and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of Interior

Lic. Rodolfo Mendoza
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
Despacho Ministerial, Of. N° 8
Palacio Nacional
6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1, Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Tel: +502 221 4428 Ext.1500
Fax: +502 251 5368
Telegrams: Ministro del Interior, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

2) Attorney General

Lic. Héctor Hugo Pérez Aguilera
Fiscal General de la Nación, Ministerio Público
18 Calle 10-36, Zona 1, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Tel/Fax: +502 331 7066
Telegrams: Fiscal General, Guatemala, Guatemala
Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

3) Minister of Defence:

Gral. Julio Arnoldo Balconi Turcios
Ministro de Defensa
Ministerio de Defensa
Palacio Nacional
6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 332 5118 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")
Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Jorge García Laguardia
Procurador de los Derechos Humanos
12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 238 1734

COPREDEH

Licda. Marta Altolaquirre
Sra. Presidenta de la Comisión Presidencial
Coordinadora de la Política del Ejecutivo en Materia
de Derechos Humanos
15 Avenida 18-38, Zona 13
Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 334 1615/334 1407

Human Rights Archbishop's Office

6 Calle 7-70, Zona 1, Guatemala 01001, GUATEMALA

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 30 June 1997.