

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 86/94 Death threats\Fear for safety

4 March 1994

GUATEMALA

Nineth Montenegro (Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo)
Byron Morales (Unión Sindical de Trabajadores de Guatemala)
Nery Barrios (Unión de Trabajadores de Quetzaltenango)
Armando Sánchez (Federación de Trabajadores del Estado)
Perci Méndez (Coordinadora de Trabajadores Municipales)
Ernesto Bol (Trade unionist from Cobán, Alta Verapaz)
Carlos Enrique Lobos (also a trade unionist from Cobán)
and Adolfo Héctor Ortiz Barrera (journalist)

Amnesty International has received reports that the first seven people listed above have been threatened with death if they do not leave Guatemala within 48 hours. The eighth has suffered a recent grenade attack on his home.

The threats were reportedly made in a letter delivered on 2 March, to the offices of the Unidad de Acción Sindical y Popular (UASP), Unity of Trade Union and Popular Action in Cobán, Alta Vera Paz. The letter is said to have been dated 26 February, and signed in the name of the "Jaguar Justiciero" or "J. J." This "death squad" first announced itself in February 1989, when it carried out a series of bombings and issued death threats against a number of student leaders. (see UA 67/89 AMR 34/04/89). Shortly after the issue of the J. J.'s 1989 death list, armed men attempted to break into the home of one of the threatened students, but fled after neighbours were aroused by the noise.

Many of those on this new J. J. list have suffered threats and abuses on a number of occasions in the past (see UA 358/93 AMR 34/70/93). See UA 39/92 AMR 34/07/92 regarding previous threats against Armando Sánchez; and AMR 34/28/91 on previous harassment and short-term imprisonment suffered by Nery Barrios.

These latest threats have come as workers, particularly state workers represented by the Government Workers Union (UITE), Instancia Unitaria de Trabajadores) and the Federación Nacional de Sindicatos de Trabajadores del Estado (FENASTEG) have carried out a series of strikes, work stoppages, occupations and demonstrations in Guatemala City to press their demands for wage increases, payment in accordance with a salary scale which they say was agreed with the government in July 1992, and suspension of current government plans for privatization of public services. In response, the government has initiated legal proceedings against workers for withdrawal of their services. There have also been a series of anonymous threats reported against workers, including those named in the latest J. J. death list. Recently, another threatened UITE trade unionist reportedly went into exile, in fear of his life. Recent threats and attacks on journalists have also been reported. Adolfo Héctor Barrera Ortiz, director of the Acen-Siag press agency, and his family suffered a grenade attack against their home in mid-February, carried out by men driving a vehicle with smoked glass windows. Héctor Barrera is the brother of Byron

Barrera, a journalist and former director of Acen-Siag, who has suffered a number of attacks in the past, including an armed assault by armed civilians in 1990 during which his wife was killed (see UA 434/90 AMR 366/90).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Trade unionists, student leaders, journalists, and those working with non-governmental organizations, particularly those attempting to investigate and protect human rights have been long-term targets of abuses in Guatemala, including harassment, torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions. Such abuses have sometimes been preceded by anonymous death threats, such as those issued in this instance.

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

-expressing concern at the threats contained in the "Jaguar Justiciero" message delivered to UASP's Cobán offices on 2 March, and at the attack in mid-February against the home of journalist Adolfo Héctor Barrera Ortiz:

-urging the government to take immediate measures to protect the safety of all those named in the "Jaguar Justiciero" communication and of Héctor Barrera;

-asking for an immediate investigation into these recent death threats and into the attack on Héctor Barrera's home.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic

S.E. Ramiro de León Carpio
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala
 Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Presidente de León Carpio,

Telex: 5331 CAPRES GU

Faxes: + 502 2 537472, + 502 2 519702

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/
 Dear President

2) Minister of the Interior

Lic. Arnoldo Ortiz Moscoso
 Ministro de Gobernación
 Ministerio de Gobernación
 Despacho Ministerial, Of. NO. 8 Palacio Nacional
 Guatemala, Guatemala

Telegrams: Ministro de Gobernacion, Guatemala, Guatemala

Faxes: + 502 2 515 368

Telexes: 5361 COMGUA GU

Salutation: Sr Ministro/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Human Rights Procurator:

Lic. Jorge García Laguardia
 Procurador de los Derechos Humanos
 12 Avenida 12-71, Zona 1,
 Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Faxes: + 502 2 81734

Archbishop's Human Rights Office
 Oficina de Derechos Humanos del

Unidad de Acción Sindical y Popular
 (UASP)

Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG)
Apartado Postal 723
Guatemala, Guatemala

10 Avenida A 5-40
Zona 1, Guatemala, GUATE

FENASTEG
13 Calle 16-08
Zona 1, Guatemala
GUATEMALA

Siglo Veintiuno (newspaper)
7a Avenida 11-63
Edificio Galerías España 6° piso
Zona 9, Guatemala, GUATE

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat if sending appeals after 15 April 1994.