

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death threats

2 December 1993

EL SALVADOR

Dr José María MÉNDEZ, lawyer

Esther de Méndez, wife of above

Dr José María MÉNDEZ, hijo, son of above, lawyer

Dr Francisco LIMA, lawyer, opposition candidate

Dr José María Méndez, a prominent lawyer and driving force behind the process of judicial reform in El Salvador, has received death threats from a so-called "death squad". His wife and son have also received threats, as has, indirectly, Dr Francisco Lima.

José María Méndez received two letters from individuals identifying themselves as members of the notorious "death squad", *Brigada Maximiliano Hernández Martínez*. On 25 November the second letter told José María Méndez to put pressure on his friend, Dr Francisco Lima, also a lawyer, who is standing as a candidate for the opposition in the presidential elections, to withdraw his candidature by 15 December. Dr Francisco Lima is standing for the coalition composed of the *Convergencia Democrática* (CD) Democratic Convergence and the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, the former armed opposition group which became a political party after signing a peace accord with the government in January 1992. Dr Francisco Lima has declared that he will not resign his election candidature.

The second letter also contained threats against his wife, Esther de Méndez, and his son. It told him to persuade his son, himself a prominent lawyer, to withdraw from a case in which he is representing the FMLN in a land dispute.

The letter called his family "communists" and warned: "Don't worry, old man, nothing will happen to you, the executions will start with Esther and continue downwards".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the end of the war in January 1992, the *Brigada Maximiliano Hernández Martínez* and other so-called "death squads" have continued to issue numerous death threats against people it identifies as sympathetic to the FMLN. Several unclarified killings of FMLN and other left wing activists this year have been attributed to shadowy "death squads", believed to be associated with hardline sectors of the military, the ruling party and the oligarchy.

These threats are the latest in a series of attacks and numerous death threats against members of the opposition, including seven killings in recent months in the context of the official opening of the electoral campaign. Most of these cases remain unresolved as thorough investigations have not been carried out. The pattern and circumstances of the killings suggest the involvement of government forces operating clandestinely, recalling the government "death

squads" which have been so notorious in the past. During the war, these clandestine groups or individuals, inextricably linked to state structures, systematically carried out killings and "disappearances" of suspected FMLN members.

Amnesty International has also been calling for an urgent investigation into the continuing activities of the "death squads" since the end of the war. The need for such an inquiry was highlighted by the Truth Commission, a body appointed by the United Nations to investigate grave human rights violations during the war (1980-92).

The government has announced that such a commission of inquiry will be set up, with the assistance of ONUSAL and the governmental *Procurador Nacional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (National Counsel for the Defence of Human Rights). However, its creation has reportedly been delayed due to disagreement over its composition.

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

- expressing concern at the death threats received by José María Méndez and his family, and urging that steps be taken to ensure their safety;
- asking that immediate steps be taken to identify those responsible and bring them to justice;
- urging the authorities to proceed immediately with the commission of inquiry into the "death squads", which should clarify all "death squad"-style killings since the end of the war, bring to justice those responsible and dismantle "death squad" structures;
- stating that the eradication of "death squads" is necessary to ensure the security of the Peace Accords and forthcoming elections and to guarantee the safeguarding human rights for the future.

APPEALS TO:

President

Lic. Alfredo Cristiani
 Presidente de la República de El Salvador
 San Salvador, El Salvador

Telegrams: President Cristiani, San Salvador, El Salvador

Faxes: + 503 81 0018 / 71 0950

Telexes: 20245 RS SAL or 20522 PRES SAL

Salutation: Su Excelencia/Your Excellency

Dr René Hernández Valiente

Ministro de Justicia
 Ministerio de Justicia
 Av. Masferrer N° 612-b
 Colonia Lomas Verde
 San Salvador, El Salvador

Telegrams: Ministro de Justicia, San Salvador, El Salvador

Faxes: + 503 23 2611

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Comisión Nacional para la
 Consolidación de la Paz (COPAZ)

Asamblea Legislativa
 6ª Planta
 Edificio Centro de Gobierno

San Salvador, El Salvador
Fax: (503) 71-3588

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Convergencia Democrática
Calle Guadalupe 1313
San Salvador, El Salvador
Fax: +503 71 0517

Centro de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho (CESPAD)
Apartado Postal 2806
San Salvador, El Salvador

Diario Latino
6^a Avda. Norte 325
San Salvador, El Salvador
Faxes: + 503 71 0971

and to diplomatic representatives of EL SALVADOR accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 13 January 1994.