

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 247/91 Fear for Physical Safety

19 July 1991

GUATEMALA: Otto PERALTA, student leader
Carmen REYNA, (f) student leader

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Otto Peralta and Carmen Reyna, two leaders of the Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios (AEU), University Students Association, of the University of San Carlos (USAC) following three incidents in which men who identified themselves as members of the National Police called on their homes and interrogated their families.

The men questioned the families about the participation of Otto Peralta and Carmen Reyna in February 1991 at the 47th General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland, where they both gave evidence to the Human Rights Commission on the human rights situation in Guatemala.

On 29 June 1991, a man dressed in plain clothes called at the Guatemala City home of AEU leader Carmen Reyna. Carmen Reyna was not at home. The caller showed the family a police badge and said he was a member of the Departamento de Investigaciones Criminológicas de la Policía Nacional (Criminal Investigations Department of the National Police). He asked the family detailed questions about Carmen Reyna's visit to Geneva to attend the UN. He wanted to know who had sponsored the visit of the AEU delegation, why the delegation went there and what they did there. The family stated that the man filled in what seemed like an official police questionnaire. He also had details of the flights the delegation had taken to Geneva and how long they had stayed there. When the family asked why the police needed this information, they were told it was for Carmen Reyna's protection.

Following the incident, Otto Peralta, Secretary General of the AEU, as well as USAC Rector Alfonso Fuentes met on 12 July 1991 with the Minister of the Interior, Fernando Hurtado Prem. The Minister assured them that no investigation had been ordered by the National Police. On that same day, a man answering the same description as the one who went to Carmen Reyna's house visited the home of Otto Peralta. He was not at home at the time, but the caller again identified himself as being from the National Police and asked similar questions of Otto Peralta's family. On the following day, 13 July 1991, the same man called again at Carmen Reyna's house, this time in the company of three other men dressed in plain-clothes and driving a four wheel drive vehicle with foreign plates. They again asked the same questions of the family, and again insisted that the investigation was being carried out for the protection of Carmen Reyna and Otto Peralta. Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Carmen Reyna and Otto Peralta and is calling on the government to investigate these incidents.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The AEU leadership and membership has been continually targeted under successive regimes in Guatemala. Amnesty International has documented scores of cases of students and their leaders who have been extrajudicially executed or "disappeared" under military and civilian governments over the past 30 years.

In August and September 1989, at least 12 students and staff from the USAC were "disappeared", seven of whom were subsequently found dead. A number of the victims were reportedly leaders of the AEU. (See *Guatemala: Human Rights Violations Directed against Student Leaders*, AI Index: AMR 34/52/89 of September

1989).

Since the new government of President Jorge Serrano Elías came to power in January 1991, Amnesty International has learned of increasing numbers of trade union leaders and members of popular movements, including the AEU, who have been subjected to threats, harassment, attempted abduction and possible extrajudicial execution. (See *Guatemala: Trade Unionists and Political Activists Targeted under the New Government of June 1991*, AI Index: AMR 34/28/91). The choice of the victim and the manner in

which these abuses have been carried out suggest the involvement of the security forces in the guise of the so-called "death squads". Many trade unionists and members of popular movements have been forced to leave the country.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern that individuals apparently posing as members of the National Police have been harassing Otto Peralta and Carmen Reyna in circumstances which raise fears for their safety;
- also expressing concern that these visits were made because of their legitimate work in monitoring the human rights situation in Guatemala;
- asking for an investigation into the incidents mentioned above, and that those found responsible be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

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Sra. María Luisa Beltranena de Padilla

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and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 August 1991.