

UA 11//07 Fear for safety

GUATEMALA Carlos Albacete Rosales (m)] Co-directors of environmental
Piedad Espinosa Albacete (f)] organisation Green Tropic (*Tropico Verde*)
Other members of *Tropico Verde*

An attempt on the lives of two environmentalists has been made in Guatemala City. Amnesty International believes that their lives and those of other colleagues are in grave danger.

Environmental activists Carlos Albacete Rosales and Piedad Espinosa Albacete, a married couple, were the subjects of an apparent attempt on their lives as they returned home from La Aurora National Airport in Guatemala City in a taxi at 12.20am on 10 January.

As they approached their house in the area known as Carretera a El Salvador, they saw a grey Volkswagen Golf parked by a bridge around 1km from their house. The car pulled out behind them and followed them until overtaking the taxi and making a 180 degree turn a few metres further on, partially blocking the road.

At least three men then got out of the car, drawing handguns as they did so. They were wearing black woollen hats and dark-coloured bullet-proof vests, dressed in black clothing similar to that used by the police but without the identifying insignia. They began to shoot immediately, forcing the taxi driver to accelerate to escape. They continued shooting from behind once the taxi cleared them, but did not pursue it any further.

Carlos Albacete was left slightly injured by broken glass, as both the front windscreen and the rear passenger seat window, next to where Carlos Albacete had been sitting, were shattered by the shots. Bullets were also left lodged in the taxi's bodywork, in the rear passenger door on Carlo Albacete's side and in the boot. A total of six bullet holes were counted. When police arrived to investigate the incident they allegedly failed to place the recovered bullets in evidence bags, putting them directly in their pockets instead.

On 12 January at around 6pm Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete received a phone call at their home, but the caller hung up as soon as Piedad Albacete answered. They left the house soon after to drive to a relative's home, and on turning into the street where the relative lives, they realised they were being followed by a black car with tinted windows. Instead of driving straight to their destination, they made a detour and called the relative from a mobile phone to ask them to open the garage door. They then drove back and entered swiftly, closing the garage door behind them.

Both Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete work for the Guatemalan environmental organisation *Tropico Verde* (Green Tropic), which works to protect the Mayan Biosphere Reserve (a nature reserve in the Petén region in northern Guatemala). During the last four years *Tropico Verde* has been active in denouncing cattle ranchers' and alleged drug traffickers' usurpation of land inside the Reserve.

Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete have been the victims of previous attacks and acts of intimidation. Following a series of verbal threats, *Tropico Verde*'s office in the Petén region was forced to close between August and December 2005 before re-opening in a more secure location. On 12 September 2006 at 11pm Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete's house was allegedly shot at with machine gun fire. On 24 September a gold-coloured vehicle with tinted windows parked outside their house at 5.30am and allegedly kept it under surveillance. Piedad Albacete noticed it when she took the household rubbish outside, as it turned on its headlights and cruised alongside her while she walked down the path and back up to the house. On 13 November 2006 Carlos Albacete and a colleague were allegedly watched by the four occupants of a vehicle whilst on a visit to the Petén region with journalists reporting on the issue of protected land. On 18 and 20 December an employee of *Tropico Verde* received telephone calls from relatives warning of persistent rumours circulating in the Petén region that there would be an attempt on the lives of Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Carlos Albacete, Piedad Albacete and other members of the organisation *Tropico Verde*;
- urging the authorities to order a thorough and independent investigation into the attempt on the lives of Carlos Albacete and Piedad Albacete, and into the threats and acts of intimidation suffered by them and their organisation previously, and to bring those responsible to justice;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations to recognize the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office

Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público

Lic. Juan Luis Florido

15 avenida 15-16

Zona 1, Barrio Gerona, 8vo. nivel

Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 2411 9124

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Estimado Sr. Fiscal General

Vicepresident of the Republic

Vicepresidente de la República

Sr. Eduardo Stein Barillas

Casa Presidencial, 6a. Avenida 4-18, Zona 1

Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 2253 0801

Salutation: Dear Vicepresident/Estimado Sr. Vicepresidente

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Defenders Protection Unit

Unidad de Protección de Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos

Movimiento Nacional de Derechos Humanos

1 Avenida 0-11, Zona 2

Colonia Lo de Bran

Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 2232 2651 (if someone answers say "tono de fax por favor")

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 27 February 2007.*****