

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK ACTION

Date: 13 July 2001

Duration: 30 August 2001

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: Continuing threats against defender of rights of Haitians

Father (Padre) Pedro Ruquoy, defender of the rights of Haitian refugees and workers in the Dominican Republic, is increasingly being threatened as a result of his work.

On 18 February 2001, an article by Pedro Ruquoy which denounced the mass arrests and deportations of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent by the Dominican authorities was published in the national newspaper El Siglo. Following the publication of this article Pedro Ruquoy, a Belgian national who is a permanent resident of the Dominican Republic, received anonymous letters, one of which declared "you are an intruder and a traitor". On 14 April, an unidentified man armed with a knife, who claimed to be a member of the Dominican army, entered Pedro Ruquoy's house and threatened to kill him. After a few moments, the man left the house and was reportedly driven off in a private vehicle. Father Ruquoy lodged a complaint with the police but no one was apprehended.

On 14 June, during a visit to a sugarcane plantation (batey) in Baoruco province where Haitian sugarcane cutters work in extremely harsh conditions, Father Ruquoy was threatened by two individuals who warned him not to return to the batey. On 16 June, in the same plantation, two men in a car similar to his were stopped by seven men. One of the men reportedly told the others "don't kill him, he isn't the Father". In response to this incident, Father Ruquoy again lodged a complaint with the police in Neiba, the provincial capital. Some men were arrested in connection with the incident, but were released after 48 hours. It is unclear whether an investigation is underway.

In August 2000, Father Pedro Ruquoy testified to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding the treatment of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. Although he participated only as a witness, Amnesty International believes that the intimidation against Pedro Ruquoy stems in part from the misrepresentation of this testimony in the press as an attack against the Dominican government. It has been used to imply that he poses a real threat to the state and has led to public verbal attacks against him by ultra-nationalist groups.

Following his declaration, the Inter-American Court called on the Dominican government to take measures to guarantee the safety of Pedro Ruquoy. Since 14 June he has been provided with police protection.

Recommended Action by the Human Rights Defenders Network:

1. Please contact bishops and other influential members of the church in your country and encourage them to send letters/faxes, in Spanish if possible, to the Dominican authorities:

- expressing concern at the continuing incidents and threats against Father Pedro Ruquoy, the latest being on 16 June in Batey 1, near Neiba in Baoruco province;
- taking note of the fact that Father Ruquoy has been provided with police protection but emphasising that this first step must now be followed by a full and impartial investigation and that those responsible for the incidents must be brought to justice;

- calling on the authorities to denounce the threats and attacks against him, and to make a clear and unequivocal public statement clarifying that Father Ruquoy's role in testifying to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights was as a witness and not as a party against the state:
- calling on the government to publicly recognize the important contribution of the work of human rights defenders to promoting the respect for human rights and the rule of law in the Dominican Republic;
- reminding the government that the right to defend human rights has been internationally recognized and established in the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, of 9 December 1998, and in three resolutions by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (AG/RES. 1671 (XXIX-O/99) of 7 June 1999, AG/RES, 1711 (XXX-O/00) of 5 June 2000 and AG/RES. 1818 (XXXI-O/01) of 5 June 2001).

2. Please also send your own appeals on this case, following the letter-writing recommendations above.

Send your appeals to:

Attorney General

Virgilio Bello Rosa

Procurador General de la República

Centro de los Héroes de Constanza

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Fax: +1 809 532 2906

Salutation: Señor Procurador General/Dear Sir

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Hugo Tolentino Dipp

Avda. Independencia No.752

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Fax: +1 809 535 6479

Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear Sir

Chief of Police

General Pedro de Jesús Candelier

Jefe de la Policía Nacional

Cuartel General Leopoldo Navarro

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Fax: +1 809 685 4510

Salutation: Señor General/Dear General

President of the Republic

S.E. Hipólito Mejía

Presidente de la República

Palacio Nacional

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Fax: +1 809 682 0827

Telex: +1 809 secpres

e-mail: correspondencias@presidencia.gov.do

Salutation: Su Excelencia/ Señor Presidente/Your excellency

If you have any queries regarding this action , please contact Tessa Mackenzie in the Americas Human Rights Defenders Program, International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St, London WC1X 0DW, UK. Tel: +44 207 413 5952. Email: tmackenz@amnesty.org