

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 03/92 Death Threats/Intimidation

3 January 1992

GUATEMALA: Roberto YANCOR, aged 18
Jorge RAMÍREZ, aged 22
José Mercedes SOTZ CATÉ

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at the reported death threats received by trade unionists Roberto Yancor, Jorge Ramírez and José Mercedes Sotz Caté.

Roberto Yancor and Jorge Ramírez are members of the Unión de Trabajadores de Quetzaltenango, (UTQ), Quetzaltenango Workers' Union, and of the theatre group Praxis. Roberto Yancor is also the Quetzaltenango representative of the Coordinadora de Estudiantes de Educación Media, (CEEM), High School Students Coordinating Committee, and Jorge Ramírez is a leader of the University Group Unidad de Acción Estudiantil, Students' Action Union. The UTQ office in Quetzaltenango has reportedly been receiving anonymous telephone threats since September 1991. The threats intensified in October 1991. The theatre group Praxis, associated to the Students' Action Union, also reportedly received warning calls telling them "to calm down" (que se calmen) after putting on, in July 1991, a play critical of the country's socio-political system. They subsequently stopped the performances. In December 1991, Roberto Yancor and Jorge Ramírez received written death threats signed by the "death squad" Ejército Secreto Anticomunista, (ESA), Anti-Communist Secret Army. The letter sent to Roberto Yancor, of which Amnesty International possesses a copy, is dated 22 December 1991 in Quetzaltenango and states:

QUEREMOS MANIFESTARLE QUE USTED ES UNA PERSONA COMO MUCHAS OTRAS NO GRATAS PARA NUESTRA ORGANIZACIÓN Y QUE CUENTA CON 48 HORAS PARA ABANDONAR EL PAIS DE LO CONTRARIO NO RESPONDEMOS DE LO QUE LE PASE A USTED Y A SU FAMILIA. LE RECOMENDAMOS NO DIGA NADA SOBRE ESTO A LA POLICIA DE LO CONTRARIO LE PODRIA IR PEOR.

"POR UN PAIS LIBRE DE COMUNISMO"

"E.S.A."

(We want to tell you that you, together with many others, are a persona non grata for our organization and that you have 48 hours to leave the country, otherwise we won't be responsible for you and your family's safety. We advise you not to tell anything to the Police, otherwise it could be worse for you. For a country free of communism. E.S.A.)

Roberto Yancor and Jorge Ramírez have now left Quetzaltenango and remain in hiding. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

José Mercedes Sotz Caté, an unemployed trade unionist, received a threatening letter on 26 December 1991 at his home in Guatemala City, similar to those

received by Roberto Yancor and Jorge Ramírez. A copy of the letter in possession of Amnesty International reads:

TENEMOS CONOCIMIENTO DE LA DENUNCIAS (sic) QUE USTED HIZO EN CONTRA DEL GOBIERNO EN EL EXTRANJERO Y QUE NUEVAMENTE ESTA EN GUATEMALA, TRABAJANDO EN EL MOVIMIENTO SINDICAL, POR LO QUE DEJAMOS UN TIEMPO LIMITE PARA QUE ABANDONE EL PAIS, DE LO CONTRARIO SERA ELIMINADO FISICAMENTE. DEBE DE ACATAR ESTE MANDATO. E.S.A.

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(We are aware of the denunciations you made abroad against the Government and that you are back in Guatemala working in the trade union movement. For this reason we give you a limited time to leave the country, otherwise you will be eliminated. You must follow this instruction. E.S.A.)

Jose Mercedes Sotz Caté has, in the past, been targeted because of his trade union activities. On 4 February 1986, while holding the post of Secretario de Finanzas (Finance Secretary) of the Sindicato Central de Trabajadores Municipales (STCM), Central Municipal Workers' Union, he was abducted in Guatemala City by three heavily armed men who beat and kicked him, reportedly to try and intimidate him into giving up his trade union activities, before he managed to escape several hours later. Three months later, on 31 May 1986, his three-year-old son José Estuardo was shot in the back as father and son were heading for a bus stop on the campus of the University of San Carlos (USAC).

The injuries to the boy have left him paralysed from the waist down. To Amnesty International's knowledge, no investigations have been carried out to establish responsibility for both incidents (see CASA 17/87 José Mercedes Sotz Caté, AI Index AMR 34/17/87 and Guatemala: José Estuardo Sotz Álvarez, AI Index AMR 34/01/90 of February 1990). The threatening letter was opened by seven-year-old José Estuardo, who has reportedly been very badly affected by it. Doctors are concerned that it may hinder the progress the child has been making for the past two years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Trade unionists and members of popular movements have been targeted since the government of Jorge Serrano Elías took office in January 1991 in a renewed wave of human rights violations. Amnesty International has learned of a large number of threats, intimidation, abduction and torture as well as possible extrajudicial executions against trade union leaders and members of popular movements in recent months (see Guatemala: Trade Unionists and Political Activists Targeted under the New Government of June 1991, AI Index: AMR 34/28/91; Urgent Actions UA 242/91, AMR 34/30/91 of 16 July 1991 and follow-ups AMR 34/38/91 of 21 August 1991 and AMR 34/43/91, 17 September 1991 and UA 433/91, AMR 34/47/91 of 11 December 1991. See also Human Rights Violations against Trade Unionists in Latin America, AI Index AMR 01/02/91 of September 1991).

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". In 1991, over twenty trade unionists have been forced to leave the country as a result of direct threats or other human rights violations against themselves.

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

- expressing concern at the threats made against trade unionists Roberto Yancor, Jorge Ramírez and José Mercedes Sotz Caté;
- asking that the source of the threats be investigated and that those found

responsible be brought to justice;

- asking that adequate steps be taken to protect the lives and physical integrity of Roberto Yancor, Jorge Ramírez and José Mercedes Sotz Caté and urge the government to take measures to ensure that trade union members are able to conduct their legitimate activities without fear of reprisal.

APPEALS TO:

1) President:

S.E. Jorge Serrano Elías
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
Palacio Nacional
Guatemala, Guatemala

Telegrams: Presidente Serrano, Guatemala, Guatemala

Telexes: 5331 CAPRES GU

Faxes: + 502 2 537472; + 502 2 519702

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente /Dear President

2) Minister of the Interior:

Lic. Fernando Hurtado Prem
Ministro de Gobernación
Despacho Ministerial
Oficina No. 8, Primer Nivel
Palacio Nacional
Guatemala, Guatemala

Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala

Telexes: 5085 MINGOB GU

Faxes: + 502 2 518105

Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

3) Attorney General:

Señor Acisclo Valladares
Procurador General de la Nación
Procuraduría General de la Nación
18 Calle 10-36
Zona 1, Guatemala
Guatemala

Salutation: Señor Procurador General / Dear Attorney General

Telegrams: Procurador General, Guatemala, Guatemala

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator:

Lic. Ramiro de León Carpio
Procurador de Derechos Humanos
Avenida Simeón Cañas 10-61
Zona 2,
Guatemala, Guatemala

International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations

Señores

Unión Internacional de Trabajadores de la Alimentación y
Afines (UITA)
6a Avenida 15-41
Oficina No. 6, 4o nivel
Zona 1, Guatemala, Guatemala

President of the Human Rights Commission of Congress:

Padre Andrés Girón León
Presidente
Comisión de Derechos Humanos
Congreso Nacional de la República
9 Av. 9-48, Zona 1
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Newspaper:

Diario Siglo XXI
7a Avenida 11-79
Edificio Galerias España, 6o piso
Zona 9, Guatemala, Guatemala

Minister of Labour:

Sr. Mario Solórzano Martínez
Ministro de Trabajo y Previsión Social
Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social
Palacio Nacional
Guatemala, Guatemala

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 14 February 1992.