

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear for safety

10 February 1995

GUATEMALA

Amílcar MÉNDEZ URÍZAR

The *Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas "Runujel Junam"* (CERJ), Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all Equal", have reported that they have learned of a plot against the life of CERJ's President, Amílcar Méndez Urizar.

According to CERJ, on 28 January a member of the security forces warned Amílcar Méndez personally of a plot, stating that it was being organized by the head of military intelligence G-2 of the armed forces for the El Quiché region and the head of the *Guardia de Hacienda* (Treasury Police) for El Quiché.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Amílcar Méndez, who has been a long-term target of the security forces. He set up CERJ's first office in Santa Cruz del Quiché.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CERJ was formed in July 1988 to protect indigenous people's rights. It has been particularly active in protesting at peasants being forced to join the ostensibly voluntary *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* (PAC), Civil Defence Patrols. Article 34 of the Guatemalan Constitution, which recognizes the right to freedom of association, states that no-one may be forced to serve in self-defence groups. The authorities maintain that the patrols are voluntary, but Amnesty International knows of scores of cases where peasants who have not wished to do patrol service have been labelled "subversives" by the army and subjected to harassment, death threats, "disappearances" and extrajudicial execution. The abuses have been carried out by uniformed soldiers as well as by men in plain clothes believed to be members of the security forces or acting under their orders.

Since former Human Rights Procurator, Ramiro de León Carpio, took over the presidency of Guatemala in May 1993, human rights violations including extrajudicial executions, "disappearances," arbitrary arrests, torture, and an increasing incidence of harassment and death threats have continued. This is despite the government's purported commitment to respect and promote human rights and to take firm action against impunity, as affirmed in a human rights accord agreed by the government and the armed opposition in March 1994. Victims have included women and children, indigenous leaders and activists, human rights monitors, journalists, students, trade unionists, jurists and politicians. Those responsible remain largely unpunished and there has been no evidence of any genuine efforts to investigate the vast majority of violations that occurred under previous administrations.

CERJ has, since its foundation, been the target of a wide range of human rights violations, and have continued to be targeted under the government of Ramiro de León Carpio. On 12 October 1994, CERJ legal advisor Gustavo Vásquez Peralta was threatened by an anonymous caller who reportedly said that he continued as advisor to CERJ he would be killed. On 29 October 1994 CERJ member José Sucunú Panjoj went to get on a bus from the capital, Guatemala City, where he worked to travel to his home in the Cantón Quijel, Chichicastenango, El Quiché department. He never arrived and has not been seen since. There are fears that his "disappearance" may be linked to his work with CERJ in his community, organizing human rights courses and workshops in his village. Amnesty

International is seeking clarification of his whereabouts.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Amílcar Méndez Urizar;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the reported plot against his life and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- seeking guarantees for the safety of Amílcar Méndez Urizar and other CERJ members.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic:

S.E. Ramiro de León Carpio
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala
 Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Telegrams: Presidente de León Carpio, Guatemala, Guatemala
Faxes: + 502 2 537472/515667
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente /Dear President

2) Minister of Interior:

Lic. Carlos Enrique Reynoso
 Ministro de Gobernación,
 Ministerio de Gobernación
 Despacho Ministerial, Of. No. 8
 Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Telegrams: Ministro de Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala
Faxes: + 502 2 515 368 / 518 105
Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

3) Commander of El Quiché Military Base

Sr. Comandante
 Base Militar No. 20
 Santa Cruz del Quiché
 El Quiché, Guatemala
Telephone: + 502 9 551005/551316
Faxes: +502 2 537472
Telegrams: Comandante, Base Militar 20, El Quiche, Guatemala
Salutation: Sr. Comandante/ Dear Commander

4) Head of El Quiché Treasury Police

Sr. Francisco Cipriano
 Jefe de la Guardia de Hacienda
 0 Calle 0-19
 Zona 2 - Santa Cruz del Quiché
 El Quiché, Guatemala
Telegrams: Jefe Guardia Hacienda Cipriano, El Quiche, Guatemala
Salutation: Sr. Jefe / Dear Head of Treasury Police

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Jorge García Laguardia
 Procurador de los Derechos Humanos
 12 Avenida 12-72
 Zona 1, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Human Rights Organization

Señores, CERJ

5a Avenida 3-13,

Santa Cruz del Quiché

El Quiché, GUATEMALA

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 25 March 1995.