

**GUATEMALA Romeldo Peña Cruz (m), trade unionist**

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Romeldo Peña Cruz, the General Secretary of the Puerto Barrios municipal workers' union, has publicly accused the mayor of Puerto Barrios of violating municipal workers' labour rights, and has also alleged that municipal officials are corrupt. He and other members of his union have since received death threats which they believe have come from a gang of petty criminals allegedly linked to the municipal authorities and the local mayor.

Peña has been receiving anonymous written and telephone threats, warning him to drop his accusations against the mayor and the corrupt officials, or meet the same fate as journalist Mynor Alegría. Alegría was shot dead outside his house in Puerto Barrios on 5 September 2001, after he publicly accused Izabal officials of corruption. Before he was shot he had reported a series of death threats directed at him by the mayor in the presence of witnesses, warning Peña to stop accusing him of corruption. (see UA 225/01, AMR 34/036/2001, 7 September 2001.)

Romeldo Peña Cruz has reported these threats to the Human Rights Procurator's (Ombudsman) regional office in Izabal, the United Nations Human Rights Verification Mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA), mandated by the UN to verify implementation of the 1996 UN-brokered Peace Accords which formally ended Guatemala's long-term civil conflict, and the Public Prosecutor's Office, which in Guatemala acts as Public Prosecutor and is responsible for the police.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The death threats against municipal workers in Puerto Barrios escalated when they staged a peaceful demonstration complaining that their wages had not been paid. After the demonstration, the workers' Christmas bonuses and overtime payments were cancelled.

Peña has also repeatedly drawn public attention to an April 2001 court order, apparently calling on the mayor to relinquish his post in order that repeated accusations of wrongdoing within the municipal council made by Peña and other municipal workers can be investigated. The mayor has refused to leave office.

It was announced in late January that an investigation by the Guatemalan Human Rights Procurator had concluded that the mayor was involved in Alegría's murder. Guatemalan newspapers reported on 24 January that a warrant for the arrest of several people close to him had been issued in connection with the killing. On the same date, the Public Prosecutor's office suggested that the mayor's immunity from prosecution as a public official be withdrawn, so that his alleged involvement can be investigated.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Romeldo Peña Cruz, General Secretary of the Puerto Barrios municipal workers' union, and his fellow trade unionists, who have received death threats from criminals with links to the mayor of Puerto Barrios, Izabal;
- urging the authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure his safety and that of his threatened colleagues;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the death threats, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;

- insisting that those working to protect trade union rights and investigating and reporting on illegal acts and corruption are not hindered and that their human rights are protected.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera  
Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
6a. Avenida "A" 4-41, Zona 1,  
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 239 0090**

**Email: mensajes@presidenteportillo.gob.gt**

**Salutation: Dear President/Señor Presidente**

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Eduardo Arévalo Lacs  
Ministro de Gobernación  
Ministerio de Gobernación  
6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4  
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 362 0239/362 0237**

**Email: monica24@intelnet.net.gt**

**Telegrams: Ministro de Gobernación, Guatemala**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro**

Minister of Labour

Lic. Juan Alfaro  
Ministro de Trabajo y Previsión Social  
Ministerio de Trabajo  
y Previsión Social  
Edificio Nasa  
14ª Calle 5-49, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 230 1363**

**Salutation: Señor Ministro**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Julio Eduardo Arango Escobar  
Procurador de Derechos Humanos  
Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos  
12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala 01001, GUATEMALA

**Telegram: Procurador de Derechos Humanos, Guatemala**

**Telefax: +502 230 0874-76**

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**E-mail: opdhg@guatenet.net.gt**

**Salutation: Señor Procurador**

News agency

CERIGUA  
2a calle 1-42, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala. Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 221 2521**

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Non-governmental human rights organisation

Alianza Contra la Impunidad  
9 Calle A, 3-27, Zona 1  
Ciudad de Guatemala, 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 12 March 2002.