

PUBLIC

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08 February 2007

UA 32/07 Fear for safety/Death threats

GUATEMALA **Francisco Soto (m)**
Angélica González (f)
Otto Navarro (m)
Jennifer Echeverría (f)
Other staff at the *Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH)*, the Centre for Legal Action on Human Rights

The four people named above make up the team of lawyers at the human rights organisation *Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH), the Centre for Legal Action on Human Rights. They provide legal support to people seeking justice on behalf of relatives killed in massacres during Guatemala's internal armed conflict. They have been subject to a number of aggressions in recent days and received a message amounting to death threat. Amnesty International believes their lives may be in grave danger.

On 5 February at 4pm, Angélica González found the following message printed out and stuck to her car windscreen: *deja de fastidiar con proteccion protegete vos misma que no entiendes con tanto aviso decile al Pancho que se cuide y lo hijos y la mujer que siempre estan solos siempre los vemos y ustedes aboganster [sic] de mierda que solo dinero quieren busquen otro trabajo sino un dia de estos saldremos a almorsar [sic] juntos como siempre nosotros invitamos 'entiendan hijos de puta'* ("Stop messing around with protection protect yourself don't you understand with so much warning tell Pancho [Francisco] to look after himself, his children and wife they are always on their own we always see them and you fucking lawyer-gangsters [a clear reference to the CALDH Justice and Reconciliation Team (JRT) of which the four are members] who only want money look for other jobs if not one of these days we'll take you out to lunch as always it'll be on us 'get it into your heads sons of a bitches'"). Her car had been parked in front of the office of the *Comisión Presidencial de Derechos Humanos* (Presidential Commission on Human Rights), where she had been attending a meeting.

On 2 February at 12pm one of her colleagues was assaulted by two men as he was getting out of his car in front of his house in Guatemala City. They forced him at gunpoint to lie down on the floor in the back of the car: one of them held him while the other drove. They drove for about 20 minutes and then left him in the suburb of Colonia Primero de Julio, on the western periphery of the city. His insurance company used satellite tracking and located the car a few hours later in the centre of the city. All of his belongings, including his chequebook and laptop, were found inside, showing that the motive had not been robbery.

The same day, at 1pm, JRT member Otto Navarro found that one of his tyres had been slashed while his car was parked outside a photocopy shop in a car park with security guards.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CALDH has been actively involved in investigating cases of human rights violations that took place during the internal armed conflict in Guatemala (1960-1996), and also current human rights concerns. In 2004 it brought the case of the Plan de Sánchez massacre (carried out by government forces in 1982) before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and achieved a ruling against the Guatemalan state which was ordered to apologize and pay compensation to survivors. Since October 2006 it has been involved in the legal proceedings against former military officers, including former Head of State General José Efraín Ríos Montt, whose arrest and extradition has been requested by Spain on grounds of universal jurisdiction for crimes against humanity and Spanish nationals killed during the internal armed conflict.

The security situation of human rights defenders in Guatemala deteriorated in 2006, and they suffered an increase in harassment and death threats. Local human rights organizations reported that 14 were killed that

year, and 278 attacked; this was a significant worsening of the situation during the previous year, when three had been killed and 214 attacked.

One of CALDH's partner organizations reported that its members had been kept under surveillance, and suffered death threats and harassment on eight separate occasions between 13 September 2006 and 23 January 2007. They reported this to the national authorities and to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which ordered the Guatemalan government to provide them with protection on 20 October 2005. Their office currently receives protection.

A number of illegal armed clandestine groups operate in Guatemala. Their members are linked to businesses and security companies, and they include common criminals, gang members and possibly both serving and retired members of the armed forces. As they have infiltrated the police and other branches of the security forces, they are able to control lucrative illegal activities such as drug smuggling and guarantee immunity from prosecution. They have been shown to be responsible for threatening or killing human rights defenders.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Francisco Soto, Angélica González, Otto Navarro, Jennifer Echeverría and other staff of the *Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH), who received a death threat on 5 February;
- calling on the authorities to order an immediate and thorough investigation, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice;
- reminding the authorities that human rights defenders have a right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's office

Lic. Juan Luis Florido

Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público

Edificio Ministerio Público

15 Avenida 15-16, Zona 1, Barrio Gerona, 8vo. Nivel, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 2411 9124

+ 502 2411 9326

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Estimado Sr. Fiscal General

Minister of Interior

Ing. Carlos Roberto Vielmann Montes

Ministro de Gobernación

6a. Avenida 13-71, Zona 1,

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2413 8658

Salutation: Dear Minister/Estimado Sr. Ministro

COPIES TO:

Centre for Legal Action on Human Rights

Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH)

6a. Avenida 1-71, Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

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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 22 March 2007.