

UA 78/01

Fear for

GUATEMALA Sylvia Gereda (f)]
Luis Escobar] journalists
Enrique Castañeda]
Other journalists at *el Periódico*

A journalist who exposed corruption at a state bank has been attacked by a man who threatened to kill her and two of her colleagues.

Sylvia Gereda, a journalist with the newspaper *el Periódico*, was attacked on the evening of 27 March as she left Del Valle university, where she is studying. Her assailant seized her by the neck and said he would kill her and her colleagues Luis Escobar and Enrique Castañeda if they wrote any more articles about the *Banco de Crédito Hipotecario Nacional* (CHN).

Sylvia Gereda and her colleagues have exposed official corruption and irregularities at the CHN, apparently related to loans granted by the bank to companies with close links to them.

Sylvia had already been warned that the bank's president had ordered somebody to watch her and her colleagues. On 28 March Enrique Castañeda was followed by a red pick-up truck on his way to work at *el Periódico*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

El Periódico has recently come under attack from supporters of the government. On 20 February a group of supporters of the ruling *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (FRG) party demonstrated outside the newspaper's offices after it published articles questioning the policies of Communications Minister Luis Rabbé. Staff of the newspaper *Prensa Libre* have also been intimidated for criticising the current administration and its policies.

During 2000 a number of Guatemalan journalists were harassed and received death threats, in particular those who had been outspoken in their criticism of the authorities (see UA 23/01, UA 212/00, AMR 34/30/00, 13 July 2000 and UA 142/00, AMR 34/18/00, 31 May 2000).

These threats come at a time of escalating political and social tensions in Guatemala. Last year, human rights defenders in Guatemala were increasingly the target of threats, and the Guatemalan authorities did nothing to effectively investigate or prevent this harassment.

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

- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective measures to protect Sylvia Gereda, Luis Escobar and Enrique Castañeda;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the reported death threats against these journalists, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of all those working to protect human rights and freedom of expression, particularly those who have recently faced threats and intimidation, including journalists at *el Periódico* and *Prensa Libre*.

APPEALS TO: (Please note that it can be difficult getting through to some of these fax numbers. Please be patient and keep trying. If a voice answers say: "fax por favor" and wait for the signal)

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Byron Barrientos
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Telegram: Ministro Gobernacion, Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: + 502 362 0239/ 362 0237
Salutation: Dear Minister / Estimado Señor Ministro

Attorney General

Lic. Adolfo González Rodas
Fiscal General de la República
Ministerio Público
8a. Avenida 10-67
Zona 1, Tercer nivel
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Telegram: Fiscal General, Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: + 502 221 2718
Salutation: Dear Attorney General / Estimado Señor Fiscal General

Minister of Communications Transport and Public Works

Lic. Luis Rabbé
Ministro de Comunicaciones Transportes e Infraestructura
Ministerio de Comunicaciones Transportes y Obras Públicas
8ª Avenida y 15 Calle, Zona 3
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA
Fax : +502 362 6066
Salutation: Dear Minister/ Estimado Señor Ministro

COPIES TO:

Newspaper

Diario "Prensa Libre"
13 Calle 9-31, Zona 1,
Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 251 8768
E-mail: webmaster@prensalibre.com.gt

Newspaper

el Periódico
15 Ave 24-51, Zona 13
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 332 9761
e-mail: opinion@elperiodico.com.gt

Journalists' Association

Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala
14 Calle 3-29
Zona 1, Guatemala
GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 238 2781

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 11 May 2001.