

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 72/94 Fear for Safety / Death threats

23 February 1994

GUATEMALA Axel MENCOS MÉNDEZ, priest
Felipe NERI QUINTANILLA, priest

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Father Axel Mencos Méndez and Father Felipe Neri Quintanilla who have both been receiving death threats over the past two to three months, most recently from a member of the *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* (PAC), Civil Defence Patrols, in Chichicastenango, El Quiché department.

According to reports, Axel Mencos Méndez, who is a priest in the parish of Chichicastenango and a vicar for the diocese of El Quiché, has been receiving death threats from a member of the PAC who belongs to the same parish. The PAC member has reportedly accused Axel Mencos of being a member of the armed opposition and of belonging to human rights groups operating in El Quiché. Also, on several occasions, anonymous threats have arrived under the door of the parish church. Several priests have made denunciations to the *Juez de Paz*, Justice of the Peace, but reportedly no investigations have been initiated.

Father Felipe Neri Quintanilla, the parish priest of Santa Cruz del Quiché, has also been threatened and accused of collaborating with the armed opposition and of opposing the PAC. Also, on 3 February 1994 a denunciation was made against Felipe Neri to the police in Santa Cruz del Quiché, signed by the same PAC member who had threatened Axel Mencos.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1988 Father Ventura Lux Herrera, who was parish priest of Chichicastenango at that time, repeatedly received death threats. On 27 July 1988 a demonstration, apparently called by the army, was held in front of the Chichicastenango parish church. Father Ventura Lux, who was expected to say mass that day, was reportedly dragged from the church by members of the PAC. He managed to escape, but continued to receive death threats and so went into hiding. Father Ventura had said mass on several occasions in the past for the widows of victims of extrajudicial executions and "disappearances". In 1992 Father Ventura Lux was killed in a car crash, allegedly an accident.

Civil Defence Patrols (PAC) were created as a component of the military counter-insurgency strategy in 1982. Although voluntary according to the Constitution, civil patrols are in effect compulsory. Those refusing to take part in them have been branded "guerrillas" and many have been subjected to human rights violations, including harassment and attacks, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution.

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

- expressing concern at the continuing death threats being received by Father Axel Mencos Méndez and Father Neri Quintanilla, reportedly from a member of the PAC belonging to the Chichicastenango parish church;
- urging the government to take steps to guarantee the safety of both priests;
- urging an immediate investigation into the threats, that the findings be made public and that those found responsible be brought to justice.

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 2 347 364

Telexes: 5331 CAPRES GU

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente /Dear President

2) Minister of Defence:

Gral. Mario Enríquez Morales
 Ministro de Defensa
 Ministerio de Defensa

Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala

Faxes: + 502 2 21906

Telexes: 5361 COMGUA GU

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

3) Commander of El Quiché Military Base:

Comandante

Base Militar No. 20

Santa Cruz del Quiché, El Quiché, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Comandante, Base Militar 20, El Quiché, Guatemala

Salutation: Sr. Comandante / Dear Commander

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

Faxes: + 502 2 81734

Auxiliary Human Rights Procurator, El Quiché:

Lic. Oscar Enrique Cifuentes Cabrera
 Procuraduría Auxiliar de Derechos Humanos
 Santa Cruz del Quiché,
 El Quiché, GUATEMALA

Human rights organization

Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo por el Aparecimiento con Vida de Nuestros Familiares (GAM),
 5a. Avenida 9-11, Zona 12, 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 6 April 1994.