

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Harassment / Fear for safety

27 April 1995

**GUATEMALA** *María de León Santiago (f), a member of Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA), National Coordinating Committee of Widows of Guatemala*

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Amnesty International is concerned at a recent attack on María de León Santiago, the latest in a series of incidents of harassment and intimidation, apparently directed at her because of her activities as a local leader of CONAVIGUA, the National Coordinating Committee of Widows of Guatemala. CONAVIGUA brings together women who lost their husbands during the army's ferocious counter-insurgency campaign of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

On 9 April 1995, at about 10:00pm, María de León Santiago was in her home in Vitzal, Santa María Nebaj municipality, El Quiché department, when people began throwing stones at her door. When she opened the door, a stone hit her head and she suffered a haemorrhage. She lost consciousness and fell to the floor. Her attackers then punched and kicked her. She was taken to the local infirmary but later transferred to a Guatemala City hospital due to the severity of her wounds and the inadequate care she was receiving at the infirmary.

In recent days prior to this incident, María de León Santiago had been constantly harassed by her attackers who had accused her of being a guerrilla and who had threatened the lives of her and her family.

At the end of August 1994 a group of uniformed soldiers came to María de León Santiago's home and harassed her, apparently to get her to end her involvement with CONAVIGUA. In October 1994 at 10 o'clock at night, three unidentified men were loitering outside her home, apparently to monitor her activities. When she became aware of their presence, they ran off towards the local military base.

The latest incident directed at María de León Santiago is believed to be a reprisal for her leadership, in March, of a caravan of Ixiles - the indigenous group to which many in her area belong - from her town to the capital, Guatemala City. The protest was organised by CONAVIGUA and other indigenous groups. It was intended to draw national and international attention to the human rights violations which the participants said continued to be suffered by the indigenous people of the area at the hands of the military, particularly military intelligence, G-2, as well as local military commissioners and the civil patrols.

Participants in the march were also calling for those responsible for new and past abuses to be brought to trial, and for their area, the "Ixil Triangle", to be demilitarised. They reported that army presence in the Triangle has in fact increased in recent months, apparently in reaction to the ongoing return to the area of refugees and displaced people who had fled the army's counter-insurgency campaign of the late 1970s and early 1980s. While in Guatemala City, the Ixiles met with a wide range of national and international organizations and representatives. However, on their return to their villages, the army once again began to threaten and harass caravan participants. (See UA 70/95, AMR 34/07/95, 16 March 1995.)

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The area known as the "Ixil Triangle," bounded by the villages of Nebaj, Chajul and Cotzal was a frequent target of the Guatemalan military's counter-insurgency campaign of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many inhabitants were extrajudicially executed by the Guatemalan army and the civilian defence squads formed at army order and acting under their command. Few, if any, of these killings have been investigated by the Guatemalan government, and abuses continue, directed against members of indigenous groups such as CONAVIGUA, and those who have joined their call for inquiries into past abuses and for an end to forced recruitment into the Guatemalan army and the civil patrols.

The late 1970s and early 1980s also saw a mass exodus from the area, as indigenous people fled before the army's advance, to seek refuge abroad or to become displaced elsewhere in Guatemala. Some refugees and displaced persons are now returning under plans agreed by refugee representatives, the Guatemalan government, representatives of the armed opposition and United Nations (UN) representatives in the context of ongoing peace negotiations. The agreements have specified that the safety of all returned refugees and displaced communities was to be assured. Yet, since returns began in 1993, there have been numerous reports of threats, attacks and harassment of returned communities, particularly in El Quiché, reportedly carried out by members of the army and their civilian adjuncts.

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

- calling for an immediate investigation into the reported threats and harassment against María de León Santiago and that those found responsible be brought to justice. Urge that steps immediately be taken to ensure her safety and the safety of all participants in the recent Ixil caravan and all members of CONAVIGUA;
- calling for an end to impunity, and that those responsible for the gross violations suffered in past years by the indigenous people of the Ixil Triangle and elsewhere throughout Guatemala be brought to justice.

#### **APPEALS TO**

##### President of the Republic:

S.E. Ramiro de León Carpio  
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
 Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telegrams: Presidente, Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Faxes: + 502 2 537472/515667**

**Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente /Dear President**

##### 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**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

##### Minister of Defence

Gral. Mario Enríquez Morales  
 Ministro de Defensa

Ministerio de Defensa  
Palacio Nacional  
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Faxes: +502 2 537472**

**Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

Coordinator of Government Peace Commission

Lic. Héctor Rosada Granados

Comisión de La Paz

Presidencia de la República

Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telephone: +502 2 516201**

**Faxes: +502 2 501967**

**Telegrams: Lic. Rosada, Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, Guatemala**

**Salutation: Licenciado / Dear Sir**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

1) Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Jorge García Laguardia

Procurador de los Derechos Humanos

12 Avenida 12-72

Zona 1, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Telephone: + 502-2 300874 to 76**

**Faxes: + 502 2 81734**

2) Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA)

8a. Avenida 2-29

Zona 1, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Tel & Fax: + 502 2 25642**

3) Human and Indigenous Rights group

Defensoría Maya

32 av. 1-56

Zona 7

Guatemala, Guatemala

**Tel: + 502 2 94 65 75**

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 8 June 1995.