

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 34/14/92

Distr: UA/SC

UA 102/92 Ill-treatment of street children

25 March 1992

GUATEMALA José VIDAL, aged 17 Nelson LARIOS, aged 13
Fernando SARCEÑO, aged 17 Axel BELMIN TENAS, aged 17
Melvin Enrique GIRÓN, aged 14 Omar Francisco MORÁN, aged 14
Ana María QUIEJ (female), aged 15
Juan LÓPEZ GONZÁLEZ (also known as "Tijuana"), aged 13
Mario René HERNÁNDEZ AGUIRRE (also known as "El Muerto") aged 17

Amnesty International is concerned at reports of a series of beatings carried out in March 1992 against nine street children in Guatemala City, by members of a recently formed security force unit called "Hunapú" ("Hunters"), comprising members of the *Policía Nacional*, National Police, and the *Policía Militar Ambulante* (PMA), Mobile Military Police, and the Armed Forces.

On 18 March 1992 at about 5pm in the Barrajuste market, in Zone 1 of Guatemala City, street children Melvin Enrique Girón and Omar Francisco Morán were reportedly detained by two members of "Hunapú", one member of the National Police and one member of the PMA. The boys claim the PMA agent hit them on the head and back and gave Melvin Enrique Girón electric shocks with a bastón chino (a type of truncheon with an electric charge at its tip), before taking them to the San José Pinula detention centre.

On 19 March 1992 at about 10am again in the Barrajuste market, José Vidal, Nelson Larios, José López González and Mario René Hernández Aguirre were reportedly detained by four members of "Hunapú". The children were forcibly shoved into a police car belonging to the transport department of the National Police and driven away. According to the children's account, they were beaten inside the vehicle and then thrown out of the vehicle in Zone 3 of the city, while it was still in motion. José López González was previously detained and beaten on 6 March 1992 by more than 35 members of the PMA, together with more than 15 other street children (see UA 85/92 AMR 34/11/92, 11 March 1992).

On the same day at about 2.30pm, in Zone 1 of Guatemala City, Fernando Sarceño and Axel Belmin Tenas were reportedly detained by two members of "Hunapú", one from the National Police and the other from the PMA. The incident occurred in front of a children's shelter run by Covenant House (Casa Alianza), an organization which works with street children in Guatemala. The agents made the children stand up against the wall and searched them. According to a witness, who also noted the identification number of one of the police officers, the PMA agent hit Fernando Sarceño in the stomach. The two children were taken away. Their present whereabouts are yet to be confirmed.

On the same day at about 5pm, in front of the shelter of Covenant House, two members of "Hunapú", one from the National Police and the other from the PMA reportedly detained Mario René Hernández Aguirre, (who had been detained earlier the same day - see above), and Ana María Quiej. The PMA member searched the children and subsequently started beating Mario René Hernández with the butt of his rifle. A security guard at the Covenant House shelter witnessed the incident and tried to intervene, telling the police officer to stop beating the children. The police officer subsequently left. The security guard noted the identification number of one of the police officers who, it was later revealed, was the same police officer allegedly involved in the beating of Fernando Sarceño and Axel Belmin Tenas (see above).

Amnesty International is concerned that the impunity with which the police appear to operate against street children in Guatemala may have encouraged the severe beating of two street children by two market sellers in the Barrajuste market in Guatemala City on 20 March 1992. The sellers who, reportedly, blamed the street children for a drop in sales in the market, beat one of the children with a metal tube on the chest, arms and legs and beat the other on the right leg and left arm. The children later reported that one of the sellers shouted "si la Policia no los ha matado, nosotros lo vamos a hacer" ("if the police don't kill you we will do it ourselves").

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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In the past two years, Amnesty International has received an escalating number of reports of human rights violations against street children in Guatemala City, including beatings, torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions, reportedly carried out by official security force agents, particularly the police, acting sometimes in plain clothes and sometimes in uniform. In other cases, abuses have been carried out by agents of private security firms (see Guatemala: Extrajudicial Executions and Human Rights Violations against Street Children, AMR 34/37/90 of August 1990, which documented many of these cases).

Approximately 62 law suits against more than 50 National Police are currently pending with the Guatemalan courts and only in isolated cases have investigations resulted in the prosecution of those responsible. Children who have witnessed or given information concerning abuses directed against other street children have been subjected to reprisals, and those working with street children have also been subjected to harassment and intimidation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the ill-treatment of the nine above-named street children by members of the newly formed "Hunapú" urban security unit;
- asking that these incidents be immediately investigated and that those found responsible be brought to justice;
- asking that immediate steps be taken to guarantee the physical integrity of those in custody.

APPEALS TO

1) President:

S.E. Jorge Serrano Elías
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Presidente Serrano,
Guatemala, Guatemala**

Telexes: 5331 CAPRES GU

**Faxes: + 502 2 537472;
+ 502 2 519702**

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

2) Minister of the Interior

Lic. Fernando Hurtado Prem Ministro de
Gobernación

Despacho Ministerial
Oficina No. 8, Primer Nivel
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación,
Guatemala, Guatemala**

Telexes: 5085 MINGOB GU

Faxes: + 502 2 518105

**Salutation: Señor Ministro /
Dear Minister**

3) Director of National Police:

Lic Carlos Enrique Samayoa Cifuentes
Director General de la Policía Nacional
6 Avenida 13-71,
Zona-1, Guatemala, Guatemala

**Telegrams: Director Policía,
Guatemala, Guatemala**

4) Attorney General:

Señor Acisclo Valladares
Procurador General de la Nación
Procuraduría General de la Nación
18 Calle 10-36
Zona 1, Guatemala, Guatemala

Telegrams: Procurador General,

Salutation: Señor Director/Dear Director

Guatemala, Guatemala
Salutation: Señor Procurador General/
Dear Attorney General

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

1) Human Rights Procurator:
Lic. Ramiro de León Carpio
Procurador de Derechos Humanos
Avenida Simeón Cañas 10-61
Zona 2,
Guatemala, Guatemala
Faxes: + 502 2 512026

2) Pro-children Commission of Congress
Señor Presidente
Comisión Pro-Niñez
Congreso de la República
7ta Avenida y 9a Calle
Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala
Guatemala

3) Casa Alianza
Apartado Postal 2704
Guatemala, Guatemala

4) Newspaper:
Siglo XXI
7a Avenida 11-79
Edificio Galerias España, 6o piso
Zona 9, Guatemala, Guatemala

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 May 1992.