

PUBLIC

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8 April 2003

UA 93/03      Fear for Safety

**GUATEMALA**    **Mario Polanco (m), director of *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM), Mutual Support Group  
Nineth Montenegro (f), Mario Polanco's wife, deputy for *Alianza Nueva Nación* (ANN),  
New Nation Alliance  
Other members of GAM**

**Killed:**      **Diego Xon Salazar (m), GAM activist**

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Mario Polanco, director of the human rights organization the *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM), Mutual Support Group, his wife Nineth Montenegro, a Congressional deputy for left-wing popular political party the *Alianza Nueva Nación*, (ANN), New Nation Alliance. Other members of GAM may also be in danger. This follows an armed raid by unidentified individuals on Mario Polanco and Nineth Montenegro's home in Guatemala City and the killing of GAM activist Diego Xon Salazar in El Quiché department.

On 7 April at approximately 12.30pm, several unidentified armed men broke into Mario Polanco and Nineth Montenegro's home in Guatemala City and demanded that the home help tell them where Mario Polanco was. When they were told that he was not at home, the men stole all of his personal files and computer equipment, files belonging to Nineth Montenegro, as well as other electronic household goods. The files are critical for GAM's human rights work, which includes investigating cases of past and present human rights abuses and an ongoing study of changes in the national budget, particularly the military budget allocation. Nineth Montenegro's work also involves investigations into military activity.

The raid took place only days after the kidnapping and subsequent killing of GAM activist Diego Xon Salazar, a Mayan priest and member of the Maya ethnic group, who was also active in a number of local indigenous organizations and human rights groups. On 5 April Diego Xon Salazar's body was found near his home in Camanchaj, a small village in the north-western highland department of El Quiché. According to reports, Diego Xon Salazar had repeatedly received death threats from local ex-civil patrollers, who were responsible for mass human rights violations during Guatemala's long-running internal conflict. GAM has indicated that his death may be linked to land conflicts in the area involving ex-civil patrollers, as well as his work as a Mayan priest.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Over the last fifteen months, there has been an increasingly serious wave of attacks and intimidation against human rights defenders in Guatemala, which has included extrajudicial executions, kidnappings, attacks and raids on their offices (see UA 173/02, 11 June 2002, AMR 34/037/2002; UA 228/02, 23 July 2002, AMR 34/45/2002; UA 43/03, 12 February 2003, AMR 34/006/2002). The victims of such threats and intimidation have included some of the most prominent human rights activists in Guatemala.

On 13 March 2003, the government took the first steps in establishing an international commission to investigate threats against human rights activists, the activities of illegal armed groups, and Guatemala's clandestine security apparatus. The commission will be known as the *Comisión para la Investigación de Cuerpos Illegales y Aparatos Clandestinos de Seguridad* (CICACS), Commission to Investigate Illegal Armed Groups and Clandestine Security Apparatus. Together with other human rights organisations, GAM is lobbying the government to contribute to the planning of the nature and mandate of the commission.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Mario Polanco, Nineth Montenegro and activists for *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM);
- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective measures to guarantee the safety of Mario Polanco, Nineth Montenegro and GAM members;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the break-in, for the results to be made public, and those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for an immediate, exhaustive and impartial investigation into the killing of Diego Xon Salazar, for the results to be made public, and those responsible to be brought to justice;
- expressing concern for the safety of all those involved in efforts to protect human rights and freedom of expression, particularly those who have suffered recent intimidation and threats;
- urging the authorities to move forward swiftly with the establishment and implementation of CICIACS, whilst ensuring its independent and international nature.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera

Presidente de la Republica de Guatemala

6a. Avenida "A" 4-41, Zona 1, Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 238 3579**

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

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Canciller Edgar Gutiérrez

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores,

2ª Avenida 4-47, Zona 10,

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 340 0100**

**Salutation: Dear Foreign Minister/Señor Canciller**

Director General of the National Civil Police

Comisario General Raul Arquimedes Manchame Leiva

Director General de la Policia Nacional Civil

6a Avenida 13-71, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 251 9382**

**Salutation: Dear Director/Senor Director**

**COPIES TO:**

Human Rights Organization

Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo

8a. Calle 3-11, Zona 1

Pasaje Fénix, apartamento 15, Ofic. 5

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 251 9037**

Newspaper

Diario Prensa Libre

13 Calle 9-31, Zona I

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

**Fax: + 502 251 8768/ 230 2193/ 230 2257**

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 20 May 2003.