

UA 93/02

Fear for

GUATEMALA Luis Chávez (m)]

Gilmar Vallejos Velásquez (m)] Rural Workers Leaders
Eleodoro Chums (m)]

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the three rural workers leaders named above, who have all recently received death threats. The men believe the threats are reactions to their efforts to organise rural peasant farmers, who are claiming their rights to gain access to cultivable land or to retain plots they are already cultivating, but whose title has been challenged.

Luis Chávez of the *Coordinadora Nacional Sindical y Popular* (CNSP), the National Trade Union and Popular Movement Coordinating Body has received telephoned death threats. He works as an advisor to two rural workers unions, one in Retalhuleu Department, the other in San Marcos Department, in Guatemala's northwestern highlands. Peasants in the latter department recently occupied contested lands on the San Luis estate, in the municipality of Malacatán, and Luis Chávez blames the death threats on local ranchers, who wish to gain control of these and other lands. Chávez believes the ranchers have the support of powerful political figures.

Gilmar Vallejos Velásquez, who works with the same land organization Chávez advises in the Department of Retalhuleu and Eleodoro Chums, a farm workers leader on the San Luis estate, San Marcos, also believes the threats against them have come from local ranchers. They point specifically to the *Asociación de Ganaderos del sur Occidente de Guatemala* (AGSOGUA), the Southwestern Cattle Ranchers Association of Guatemala. Together with Luis Chávez, they denounced the threats against them to the United Nations (UN) Verification Mission (MINUGUA) in Guatemala on 21 March. All three men say they will hold AGSOGUA and Guatemalan authorities responsible for any attacks upon them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There has been an increase in the number of land disputes in recent months in Guatemala as peasants have been losing confidence that the 1996 Accord on Socio-Economic Issues and the Agrarian Situation, will ever be implemented.

The Accord had promised to ensure the peasantry greater access to land, and was an important plank of the 1996 Peace Accords.

Increasingly desperate groups of peasant farmers in several Guatemalan departments, have occupied lands or refused to vacate other plots which they believe they have the right to cultivate. On 26 February, some 350 peasant families occupied the San Luis estate, in San Marcos Department in Guatemala's northwestern highlands. They were trying to secure recognition of what they say are their rights to the land of the estate. They pointed to titles granted under Guatemala's 1944 agrarian reform, which they said gave them rightful ownership of the land. However, the Chamber of Agriculture insists that according to other agreements, the land is private property.

San Marcos church figures who had attempted to mediate and assist the peasant farmers on the San Luis estate, have also recently received death threats. (See UA 67/02, AMR 34/015/2002, 7 March 2002).

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

- urging the authorities to investigate the recent death threats against Luis Chávez, Gilmar Vallejos Velásquez and Eleodoro Chums and bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to prevent further violence by addressing the San Luis land dispute as soon as possible;
- reminding them that under the 1996 Accord on Socio-economic Issues and the Agrarian Situation, part of the Peace Accords, the government is to "develop an integrated strategy in rural areas that will facilitate the access of peasant farmers to the land and other productive resources, offer judicial redress and promote the resolution of conflicts." (*"Que en el área rural es necesaria una estrategia integral que facilite el acceso de los campesinos a la tierra y otros recursos productivos, que brinde seguridad jurídica y que favorezca la resolución de conflictos."*)

APPEALS TO:Minister of Agriculture, Livestock & Nutrition

Sr. Leopoldo Sandoval Villeda

Ministro de Agricultura, Ganadería y Nutrición

Ministerio de Agricultura Ganadería y Nutrición

Edificio Monja Blanca, 7^a Avenida 12-90 Zona 13

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegram: Minister of Agriculture, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA**Fax: + 502 332 8302****Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro**Director of Land Trust

Lic. Sergio Funes, Director

Fontierras

7 Avenida 8-92, Zona 9,

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegram: FONTIERRAS, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA**Telefax: + 502 334 6373/334 6376/334 2422 (If someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor")****Salutation: Dear Director/Señor Director**

The Land Trust was established under the Peace Accords to administer public finance for the acquisition of lands for "Re-ordering land use," [reordenamiento territorial] promoting a "transparent" land market...etc)

Director, Agriculture Chamber

Director, Cámara de Agro

15 Calle 3-20, Zona 10

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Telegram: CAMAGRO, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA**e-mail: info@fontierras.gob.gt****Salutation: Dear Director/Señor Director**Presidential Land Agency

Pedro Palma Lau, Director Ejecutivo

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COPIES TO:

Newspaper

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15 Ave 24-51, Zona 13

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: + 502 332 9761 El Periódico

Salutation: Señores/Dear sirs:

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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 9 May 2002.