

UA 164/99

Fear for**GUATEMALA Members of FAMDEGUA**

Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety of members of the *Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos de Guatemala* (FAMDEGUA), Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared of Guatemala, and other relatives of "disappeared" Guatemalans, who have been harassed and received death threats during the last two months.

On 22 May 1999, the FAMDEGUA representative in El Petén department, Francisco Sánchez Méndez, reportedly found two armed men waiting near his house when he returned from the organization's local office in the evening. The men told him: "*la muerte te espera en la puerta de tu casa*", "death is waiting for you at your house".

According to a FAMDEGUA denunciation to the United Nations Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), this is only one of many times the organization has been threatened and harassed over the last two months. Members of FAMDEGUA and a number of its leaders, including Aura Elena Farfán, have received telephone death threats. They have often seen men watching the organization's central office in Guatemala City.

FAMDEGUA believes that these incidents are linked to the publication of a log-book on 20 May 1999, which allegedly records the activities of a Guatemalan military death squad during an 18-month period in the 1980s. It includes some 183 cases of people who were taken into custody by this group, with information as to whether they were tortured, kidnapped and executed, or released after interrogation by this group. FAMDEGUA has initiated a series of judicial steps related to this document and the cases included in it.

A relative of one of the people listed in the log-book has reportedly received telephone death threats telling her: "*vamos a retorcerte la cabeza*", "we are going to wring your neck".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years, human rights groups have been struggling to have the remains of people extrajudicially executed by the Guatemalan security forces and their civilian auxiliaries during Guatemala's long-running civil conflict exhumed from mass clandestine graves, so the bodies can be returned to their families for formal burial. These groups, including FAMDEGUA, and those who support them, have frequently been threatened and intimidated. There are allegedly over 500 clandestine cemeteries in Guatemala where thousands of non-combatant civilians are believed to be buried.

On 20 May 1999, four US human rights organizations published a 54-page document, apparently a military intelligence logbook, which appears to have details of the activities of a secret military unit tasked with kidnapping, torturing and executing suspected Guatemalan subversives. The group's alleged activities took place over an 18-month period between August 1983 and March 1985. The document includes a list of 183 people, complete with names, nicknames, photographs, occupations, dates and place of arrest. In most cases, the dates they were killed also are noted. The US Department of State has said it believed the document to be authentic.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/e-mails/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern at the threats against FAMDEGUA members and other relatives of "disappeared" people, and urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee their safety;
- urging the authorities to investigate these threats, to make the findings public and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice;
- reminding the government of the Organization of American States (OAS) resolution of 7 June 1999, especially article 3: "to deplore acts that directly prevent or hamper the work of human rights defenders, at the national and/or regional level, and to urge member states to continue taking the necessary steps to guarantee their life, liberty and integrity".
- urging the Guatemalan government to investigate the cases of "disappearances" listed in the apparent military log-book, to bring those responsible to justice, and to guarantee the safety of the survivors.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala

S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen
 Presidente de la República
 de Guatemala

Palacio Nacional
 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida, Zona 1
 Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Presidente, Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 221 4537/230 1508

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Salutation: Sr. Presidente / Dear President

Minister of Defence

Gral. Marco Tulio Espinosa Contreras
 Ministro de Defensa Nacional
 Ministerio de Defensa

Avenida Reforma 2-43, Zona 10
 Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 360 9909

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

Attorney General

Lic. Adolfo González Rodas
 Fiscal General de la República
 Ministerio Público

6ª Avenida 3-11, Zona 4
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Fax: + 502 362 7223

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Attorney General

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Julio Eduardo Arango Escobar
 Procurador de Derechos Humanos
 Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos

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Salutation: Sr. Procurador / Dear Procurator

Human Rights Organization
Familiares de Detenidos y
Desaparecidos de Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)
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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 24 August 1999.