

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Possible Extrajudicial Execution

4 July 1991

GUATEMALA:

Celistino JULAJ VICENTE (aged 21)

Amnesty International is concerned at what appears to be the extrajudicial execution of 21-year-old Celistino Julaj Vicente on 28 June 1991, in San Pedro Jocopilas, El Quiché department. Celistino Julaj was a member of Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas "Runujel Junam" (CERJ), Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all Equal".

On 28 June 1991 Celistino Julaj, together with his wife and child went from his home in the cantón (hamlet) of Chuitzalic, in the municipality of San Pedro Jocopilas, to a one-day festival in the town of San Pedro Jocopilas.

During the festival the family were reportedly followed by three members of the Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC), Civil Defence Patrols from Xoljuyub, a hamlet of San Pedro Jocopilas municipality. As Celistino Julaj and his wife and child were walking home from the festival, an unidentified man dressed in olive green grabbed Celistino Julaj and threw him to the ground. The man drew out a gun and shot Celistino Julaj four times in front of his wife and child, and fled the scene. He was shot once in the face and three times in the lower back; the coroner later retrieved a .38 calibre bullet from his body.

A .38 fire-arm is a standard issue army pistol.

On 15 May 1991 civil patrol chiefs from the whole municipality of San Pedro Jocopilas reportedly attended a meeting in which they declared that they would assassinate any CERJ members attending the forthcoming local festival.

It was against the advice of friends and relatives that Celistino Julaj attended the festival.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CERJ was formed in July 1988 to protect indigenous people's rights. It has been particularly active in protesting at peasants being forced to join the ostensibly voluntary Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC), Civil Defence Patrols. Article 34 of the Guatemalan Constitution, which recognizes the right to freedom of association, states that no-one may be forced to serve on self defence groups. Since 1988 Celistino Julaj and others in his community stopped participating in the PAC. Celistino Julaj joined CERJ in 1988 and was one of four CERJ delegates in his community. Almost immediately after they decided to stop participating in the PAC, they began receiving death threats from the PAC chief, who told them that the army would be called to kill them. In October 1988 several members of the armed forces came to Chuitzalic to try and force the new CERJ members to resume their patrolling, but were prevented by the presence of the Procurador Auxiliar de los Derechos Humanos (Auxiliary Human Rights Procurator) for El Quiché, and members of the National Police who had come to the community at the request of the threatened CERJ members. After this incident the CERJ members continued to receive death threats. On 10 April 1990 José (accent on e) Vicente García (accent on i), a cousin of Celistino Julaj and a member of CERJ, was killed in the municipality of San Pedro Jocopilas.

At the time of his killing his family reported that José García had received death threats from the mayor and the commander of the local PAC in Chuitzalic, where he lived. (See UA 145/90, AI Index: AMR 34/29/90, 12 April 1990).

The authorities maintain the patrols are voluntary, but Amnesty International knows of scores of cases where peasants who have not wished to do patrol service have been labelled "subversives" by the army and subjected to harassment, death threats, "disappearances" and extrajudicial execution.

The abuses have been carried out by uniformed soldiers as well as by men in plain clothes believed to be members of the security forces or acting under their orders.

CERJ has since its foundation been the target of a wide range of human rights violations. Since January 1991 four CERJ members and three relatives of CERJ members are known to have been killed in circumstances suggesting official involvement.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the apparent extrajudicial execution of Celestino Julaj Vicente in circumstances suggesting the involvement of the security forces or civil patrols under their command.

- urging that a full and impartial investigation be initiated immediately into his killing and that the results be made public;

- urging that those found to be responsible be brought to justice;

- asking for guarantees for the physical security of his family and other members of CERJ from the municipality of San Pedro Jocopilas.

APPEALS TO

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and to diplomatic representatives of in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 August 1991.