

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety

2 September 1997

GUATEMALA Felipa Toj Gómez (f), human rights defender
Manuela Macaria Morales (f), human rights defender

- members of the Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all Equal" (*Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas "Runujel Junam, CERJ"*)

Human rights defenders Felipa Toj Gómez and Manuela Macaria Morales have been forced to leave their homes in the municipality of Chiquiz, El Quiché, after six armed men wearing hoods and dressed in olive green clothes similar to those worn by the army surrounded their homes on 26 August 1997.

The two women are members of the Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all Equal" (*Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas "Runujel Junam", CERJ*) and have led human rights workshops aimed specifically at indigenous women. Since the incident, they have been taking refuge in the CERJ offices in the town of Santa Cruz del Quiché.

CERJ believes that the latest incident is linked to threats that have been made by two members of the community in which the women live. These two individuals have accused Manuela Macaria Morales, Felipa Toj Gómez and others of belonging to the former Guatemalan guerrilla group, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, (*Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, URNG*) and have been keeping watch on their activities. CERJ has called on the government to undertake an immediate investigation into the incident and to guarantee the safety of the two women.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CERJ was formed in July 1988 to protect indigenous peoples' rights and was particularly active in protesting at peasants being forced to join the Voluntary Civil Defence Committees (*Comités Voluntarios de Defensa Civil, CVDCs*), auxiliary bodies of the armed forces which were implicated in serious human rights violations. Though formally disbanded, former members of the CVDCs continue to commit human rights violations. Since its foundation, CERJ has been the target of a wide range of human rights violations, in particular directed at its president, Amílcar Méndez Urizar.

Despite the signing of a peace agreement between the government and the URNG in December 1996, Amnesty International has continued to receive an alarming number of reports of death threats and harassment against human rights defenders and relatives of victims of army massacres. The authorities have failed to carry out full investigations to identify those responsible and bring them to justice.

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

- expressing concern about the threats against Felipa Toj Gómez and Manuela Macaria Morales;
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee their safety, to investigate without delay the acts of intimidation to which they have been subjected in order to identify those responsible and bring them to justice;
- calling for all necessary steps to effectively prevent threats, intimidation, or other human rights violations against human rights defenders in line with the March 1994 Global Human Rights Accord, one of the agreements reached between the URNG and the government during the peace process negotiations. Clause 7 of the Accord stated that the Guatemalan Government agreed to take steps to ensure the security of people and institutions working in human rights protection.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

Sr. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen

Presidente de la República de Guatemala

Palacio Nacional

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Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Faxes: +502 221 4537/230 1502 (if voice, ask "me puede dar tono de fax, por favor")

E-mail: alvaroarzu@guatzeonnet.com

Telegrams: Presidente, Guatemala, Guatemala

Salutation: Sr Presidente / Dear President

Attorney General

Lic. Héctor Hugo Pérez Aguilar

Fiscal General de la Nación

Ministerio Público

6ª Avenida 3-11, Zona 4

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Telegrams: Fiscal General, Guatemala, Guatemala

Salutation: Señor Fiscal / Dear Attorney General

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Jorge Mario García Laguardia

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Head of the Presidential Coordinating Committee of the Policies of the Executive relating to Human Rights

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Human Rights Organization

Señoras

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Santa Cruz del Quiché, El Quiché, GUATEMALA

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 16 October 1997.