

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats

22 July 1991

GUATEMALA:

Hugo Arce

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Hugo Arce, a journalist working for the Guatemalan daily newspaper Siglo XXI, who has been reportedly receiving repeated death threats.

According to the information received by Amnesty International, Hugo Arce has been receiving threats for several months, reportedly since he started writing articles highly critical of the government of President Jorge Serrano Elías, who took office in January 1991. Hugo Arce reported receiving threatening telephone calls and, on 4 July, as he was walking towards his car, two men approached him and asked him whether he was not afraid for his life, as he was, he was told, a "very well known but careless person" ("una persona muy conocida y muy descuidada") and he should remember what happened to Humberto González Gamarra (a journalist who was gunned down in October 1991). The men allegedly also told him to stop being critical of the government. The next day Hugo Arce reported being followed by a car with three men as he was going out for dinner with his wife. On 12 July a car reportedly pulled up alongside the vehicle Hugo Arce was driving with his family, and one of the occupants pointed a gun at his car. Since then, he has reportedly continued to receive constant telephone threats and his house has been under surveillance.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 9 February 1991 Hugo Arce was arrested by the Guatemalan National Police, who claimed they had found a satchel containing cocaine and explosive materials in his car. He consistently denied the charges and was released on 25 February for lack of evidence. Several sources in Guatemala expressed fears that the arrest may have been the result of the Hugo Arce's critical articles. It has been reported in the press that two days before his arrest, in a meeting with Siglo XXI's editor Rubén Zamora, the then Minister of the Interior asked for his collaboration to moderate the tone of Hugo Arce's articles. Hugo Arce has also been a prominent critic of the past government of Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo.

President Jorge Serrano Elías came to power in January 1991. During his presidential campaign he had pledged to ensure protection of human rights. Since then several policemen were sentenced for human rights violations against street children and the establishment of a commission of inquiry into the many "disappearances" since the early 1980s was announced. However, Amnesty International remains seriously concerned at what appears to be a deterioration in the human rights situation in the country in past months, including killings, death threats, torture and "disappearances". As in past years, the choice of victim and the manner in which the abuses have been carried out suggest the involvement of the security forces in the guise of the so-called "death squads".

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

- expressing concern at reports that Hugo Arce is receiving repeated threats, apparently on account of his criticism of the government;
- asking that the threats and the intimidating incidents be investigated and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- asking that adequate steps be taken to ensure the physical safety of Hugo Arce and his family.

APPEALS TO:

S.E. Jorge Serrano Elías **Señor Presidente**
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala
 Palacio Nacional
 Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegrams: Presidente Serrano, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telexes: 5331 CAPRES GU
Faxes: + 502 2 537472; + 502 2 519702
Tel No: + 502 2 21212, + 502 2 22266

Lic. Fernando Hurtado Prem **Señor Ministro**
 Ministro de Gobernación
 Despacho Ministerial
 Oficina No. 8, Primer Nivel
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 Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala
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Tel No: + 502 2 21212, ext 500; 518105-6

Señor Acisclo Valladares **Señor Procurador General**
 Procurador General de la Nación
 Procuraduría General de la Nación
 18 Calle 10-36
 Zona 1, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegrams: Procurador General, Guatemala, Guatemala
Tel No: + 502 2 64697, + 502 2 313656; + 502 2 518385

Gral. Luis Francisco Mendoza García **Señor Ministro**
 Ministro de Defensa
 Ministerio de Defensa
 Palacio Nacional
 Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegrams: Ministro Defensa Mendoza, Guatemala, Guatemala
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COPIES TO:

Lic. Ramiro de León Carpio
 Procurador de Derechos Humanos
 Avenida Simeón Cañas 10-61
 Zona 2,
 Guatemala, Guatemala

Padre Andrés Girón León
 Presidente
 Comisión de Derechos Humanos
 Congreso Nacional de la República
 9 Av. 9-48, Zona 1
 Guatemala, Guatemala

Diario Siglo XXI
 7a Avenida 11-79
 Edificio Galerías España, 6o piso
 Zona 9, Guatemala, Guatemala

Dr. Edmundo Vásquez Martínez

(Señor Presidente de la Corte Suprema de Justicia)

Presidente de la Corte
Suprema de Justicia
Centro Cívico
21a Calle y 7a Avenida
Guatemala, Guatemala

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 September 1991.