

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 269/91 Harassment

5 August 1991

GUATEMALA:

Members and leaders of the Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA), National Coordinating Committee of Widows of Guatemala

Amnesty International is concerned at reports of continuous harassment and intimidation directed at leaders and members of the Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA), National Coordinating Committee of Widows of Guatemala.

On 24 July 1991, at about 5:00pm, María Morales, one of CONAVIGUA's leaders, had just left CONAVIGUA's offices in Guatemala City when an unidentified man reportedly blocked her way and aggressively started questioning about her involvement in CONAVIGUA. He warned her that she should not work with the organization and added that he was a member of the Policía Nacional (National Police) and an escort to a colonel. He also reportedly tried to grab hold of her but she managed to run away. María Morales has allegedly been the target of abduction attempts and death threats in recent months. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for her safety.

A few days later, at about midnight on 28 July 1991, several uniformed policemen in two cars reportedly arrived at the offices of CONAVIGUA, and started ringing the door bell insistently. Among those sleeping that night at CONAVIGUA's premises were six children and four leaders of the organization.

When they opened the door, two policemen forced their way into the building without a warrant and reportedly started searching everything. They shone their electric torches in the faces of those still in bed and accused the women of hiding "someone". Two other policemen stayed at the door and took down personal details from Fermina López, one of the leaders. When another woman leaned out from a first floor window to look towards the street a policeman allegedly fired a gun-shot in the air. The police eventually left.

CONAVIGUA was founded in 1988 by women whose husbands "disappeared" or were killed as a result of the Government's counter-insurgency campaigns and has been active in denouncing human rights violations suffered by their families and in campaigning for better living conditions for Guatemalan widows and their children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 have been 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 an increased number of killings, death threats, torture and "disappearances". Members and leaders of human rights groups, including CONAVIGUA and other popular organizations, have been particularly targeted.

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

- expressing concern at the reported intimidation of María Morales and other members of CONAVIGUA;
- asking that immediate steps be taken to ensure the safety of María Morales and other CONAVIGUA members;
- asking that the threats and the intimidating incidents involving María Morales and the alleged illegal search of CONAVIGUA be investigated and that those responsible be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

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Excelentísimo Sr.

Presidente

Presidente de la República de Guatemala

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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 16 September 1991.