

PUBLIC

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UA 185/05 Fear for safety/Death threats

GUATEMALA **Mario Antonio Godínez López (m), aged 37, human rights defender**

Human rights defender Mario Antonio Godínez López had a death threat faxed to his office on 7 July. His work in defence of local communities has brought him into conflict with a number of powerful people, and Amnesty International believes his life is in danger.

He has been active in supporting local indigenous communities who are defending their land against hotel developers who want to build a holiday resort, and against a Canadian mining company which wants to expand an opencast gold mine in the region, without consulting the local communities, who are almost universally opposed to the plan because of the damage it will do to the environment.

Mario Godínez is the head of the *Asociación para la Promoción y el Desarrollo de la Comunidad* (CEIBA), Association for the Promotion and Development of the Community. The organisation has been actively lobbying against the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which the Guatemalan government ratified in March 2005. CAFTA is supported by business leaders, while its opponents allege that it will destroy local agriculture and restrict local production of medicines, while allowing US multinationals increased access to Guatemalan markets. The USA has not yet ratified it, and in April Mario Godínez travelled to Washington to lobby against ratification with a delegation led by the Archbishop of San Marcos. A prominent Guatemalan politician responded by accusing Mario Godínez of having links to organised crime, an accusation which amounts to a death threat.

The threatening fax arrived at the CEIBA office in the department of Chimaltenango, east of Guatemala City, at 7.40am on 7 July. It warned Mario Godínez that *las últimas acciones desestabilizadoras hechas por su organización, han provocado, descontento e indignación en las organizaciones que trabajamos por la paz del departamento* ("the latest destabilising actions carried out by your organisation have caused dissatisfaction and indignation among those organizations that work for peace in the department"), and warned CEIBA not to hold meetings of more than 20 people or else *ya que entenderemos como un acto de nueva provocación y reaccionaremos en respuesta* ("we will consider it an act of provocation and act accordingly"). The fax ended, *Le recomendamos mucha prudencia en lo que de aquí en adelante planeen en las comunidades y en el departamento* ("we recommend you be very prudent in what you plan to do in the communities and in the department in the future.")

CEIBA has given support to rural communities involved in land disputes and coordinated opposition to opencast mining projects and to CAFTA, which the government recently signed and ratified. In March 2005 there were nationwide demonstrations against CAFTA, in which one person died and others were injured. Afterwards, armed men came looking for Mario Antonio Godínez López at the CEIBA office in Huehuetenango, where he usually works. He was abroad at the time.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing grave concern for the safety of Mario Godinez, who received a death threat on 7 July;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to protect Mario Godinez, his family and others working for the *Asociación para la Promoción y el Desarrollo de la Comunidad (CEIBA)*, in line with their own wishes.

APPEALS TO:

Attorney General

Fiscal General de la República y jefe del Ministerio Público, Juan Luis Florido, 8a. Avenida 10-67, Zona 1, Antiguo Edificio del Banco de los Trabajadores, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: + 502 2251 2218

Salutation: Estimado Fiscal General/Dear Sir

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Presidente de la República de Guatemala

Licenciado Oscar Berger Perdomo

Casa Presidencial, 6 a. Avenida, 4-18 zona 1. Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 2221 4423

+502 2239 0090

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Berger

COPIES TO:

Human rights organization

Asociación para la Promoción y el Desarrollo de la Comunidad

Oficinas Centrales, Km. 56. 5 carretera Interamericana, Aldea Buena Vista, Chimaltenango, GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 78396033

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 22 August 2005.