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Attack on Street Children

12 August 1991

GUATEMALA

Carlos Hernández, aged 16
"Caballo", aged 15

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that on Friday 9 August 1991, two unidentified men opened fire against two street children, Carlos Hernández and another nicknamed "Caballo".

According to the information received by Amnesty International, on Friday 9 August, Carlos Hernández and "Caballo" were sitting under the Amate Bridge, the usual meeting point for street children, in 19th street between 4th and 5th Avenues, in Zone 1 of Guatemala City.

At approximately 1:30 pm an unmarked white pick-up truck drove by. Two armed men dressed in civilian clothes who were inside it, reportedly opened fire without any warning.

According to the doctors of the San Juan de Dios hospital where he was taken after the shooting, Carlos Hernández received a bullet wound in the right thigh from a 38 calibre pistol. "Caballo" was not hit, although the unidentified men were allegedly shooting at his legs.

After the incident, he reportedly sought assistance from Covenant House (Casa Alianza), an organization which works with street children in Guatemala and has been in the forefront of efforts to investigate recent police abuses against children, including harassment, torture, "disappearance" and killings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over the past year, Amnesty International has received an escalating number of reports of human rights violations against street children in Guatemala City, including beatings, torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions, reportedly carried out by official security force agents, particularly the police, acting sometimes in plain clothes and sometimes in uniform. In other cases, abuses have been carried out by agents of private security firms (see *Guatemala: Extrajudicial Executions and Human Rights Violations against Street Children*, AMR 34/37/90 of August 1990, which documented many of these cases).

Approximately 39 legal suits against more than 50 National Police are currently pending with the Guatemalan courts and only in isolated cases have investigations resulted in prosecution and conviction of those responsible. Children who have witnessed or given information concerning abuses directed against other street children have been subjected to reprisals, and those working with street children have also been subjected to harassment and intimidation. In July unidentified gunmen opened fire on *Casa Alianza's* crisis centre, after shouting death threats against Bruce Harris, its executive director, *Casa Alianza* staff and the street children (see UA 246/91 - Death Threats - Bruce Harris, Staff and Street Children of Covenant House (*Casa Alianza*), AMR 34/31/91 of 18 July 1991). At the beginning of August, the Magistratura de Menores (juvenile court), ordered the closure of Casa Alianza's Legal Office on the grounds that it has no authority to defend minors.

Also, according to reports received by Amnesty International, the heavily tortured body of an unidentified street child, of seven or eight years of age, was found on 31 July among the rubbish close to an electricity pylon in Zone 3 of Guatemala City. His eyes had been gouged out, and his head beaten or crushed so badly that it was impossible to identify him. Casa Alianza staff are pressing for an investigation into the killing.

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

- expressing concern at the incident in which two unidentified men opened fire on Carlos

Hernández and "Caballo", wounding the former;

- asking that the incident be thoroughly and impartially investigated and that those found responsible be brought to justice;

- urge the Government to take steps to ensure the security of street children and those working on their behalf and that they are no longer subjected to human rights violations.

PLEASE ORGANIZE APPEALS FROM CHILDRENS' RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

APPEALS TO

S.E. Jorge Serrano Elías **Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente**
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
Palacio Nacional
Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegrams: Presidente Serrano, Guatemala, Guatemala
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Lic. Fernando Hurtado Prem **Señor Ministro**
Ministro de Gobernación
Despacho Ministerial
Oficina No. 8, Primer Nivel
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Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala
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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

Cnel. Julio Enrique Paiz Bolaños **Señor Director**
Director General de la Policía Nacional
6 Avenida 13-71
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Guatemala
Telegrams: Director Policia, Guatemala, Guatemala

COPIES TO:

Lic. Ramiro de León Carpio
Procurador de Derechos Humanos
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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 23 September 1991.