

PUBLIC

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19 October 2005

UA 274/05      Death threats and intimidation

GUATEMALA      **Romeo Monterrosa Orellana (m), lawyer  
His wife and two daughters, aged 10 and 11**

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Lawyer Romeo Monterrosa and his family have received a string of death threats, and suffered intimidation, believed to be linked to his work defending peasant farmers against powerful landowners. Amnesty International believes they are in grave danger.

Romeo Monterrosa is representing the human rights NGO *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM), as party to the state prosecution proceedings, in charging the owner of the El Corozo farm with the murder of eight farm workers who were shot dead during protests against the land owner on 24 January 2005. Police were present but took no action. Families of the victims have withdrawn their charges, allegedly under pressure from the landowner. Judge José Víctor Bautista Orozco was withdrawn from the case in April 2005; he was murdered a few days later.

Romeo Monterrosa is also representing the farm workers who claim ownership of the *Colonia La Catorze* farm, which is on the coast in Puerto San José. The farm was sold to a Panamanian company in 1996, despite the fact that the Constitution prohibits non-Guatemalans from owning property within 15km of the country's borders, including its coastline. The notary public who authorised the deal is now the Solicitor General

On 30 September, while at a meeting to discuss land rights cases in the office of the Solicitor General (*Procurador General*), Romeo Monterrosa received a text message on his mobile saying "*sabes que sos un hijo puta y que todo lo que has hecho en tu puta vida lo vas a pagar con lo que más quieres*," "you know you are a son of a bitch, and everything you have done in your fucking life, you are going to pay for it with what you love most." Romeo Monterrosa fears that "what you love most" means his daughters. Two days earlier his wife had been followed to work by a pick-up truck which she could not shake off.

During the night of 8 October, there was an unsuccessful attempt to burgle Romeo Monterrosa's office. The lock was badly damaged but prevented the door from opening.

GAM reported all this to the Supreme Court on 11 October, asking the authorities to order an investigation.

On 16 October, his wife received three text messages that appeared to come from Romeo Monterrosa's mobile phone, between 4 and 5pm. The first read, "*Comuniquese conmigo, me urge hablarle*", "Get in touch with me, I need to talk to you urgently"; the second "*Le estoy llamando, devuelvame la llamada*", "I'm trying to call you, return the call", and the last simply "*Comuniquese*", "Get in touch". She contacted him but Romeo Monterrosa had not sent any messages.

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

- expressing grave concern for the safety of lawyer Romeo Monterrosa Orellana, his wife and daughters, who have suffered death threats and intimidation;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate measures to protect Romeo Monterrosa and his family, in accordance with their own wishes;
- calling on the authorities to carry out a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the threats and other acts of intimidation, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;

- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to end the intimidation of those defending and supporting communities involved in land conflicts, so that they can carry out their lawful activities without fear of intimidation;

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of the Interior

Ministro de Gobernación

Carlos Vielman

6a.Avenida 4-64, zona 4, nivel 3

Ciudad de Guatemala. GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 2362 0237**

**+502 2361 5657**

**Salutation: Estimada Ministro/Dear Minister**

Attorney General

Fiscal General de la República y Jefe del Ministerio Público

Juan Luis Florido Solís

8a. Avenida 10-67, Zona 1, Tercer Nivel. Antiguo Edificio del Banco de los Trabajadores

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 2251 2218**

**Salutation: Estimado Fiscal General/Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

President of the Supreme Court

Presidenta de la Corte Suprema de Justicia y del Organismo Judicial

Lcda. Beatriz Ofelia De León Reyes

7ª Avenida y 21 Calle, Zona 1, Centro Cívico Justicia, Edificio Corte Suprema de Justicia, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 2232 6626**

**+502 2248 7116 (If someone answers say, "Tono de fax por favor")**

Human Rights NGO

Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo

8a Calle 3-11 Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Fax: +502 2220 0606**

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 30 November 2005.