

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety/Harassment/Intimidation

01 August 2003

GUATEMALA Norma Maldonado (f) environmental justice activist
Members of *Mamá Maquín*, a women's human rights organization

Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety of Norma Maldonado, and for her environmental activist colleagues. This follows a recent raid on her home, which appears to be part of a wider pattern of intimidation and harassment directed against the leadership of environmental groups.

At 9am on 24 July, three armed men forced their way into Norma Maldonado's Guatemala City home. The intruders dragged those present, including a member of the Board of Directors of *Mamá Maquín*, a rural indigenous women's rights group and a student from the United States (US) who had been working with them, to the building's ground floor. The men opened files on several computers, rifled through papers, diskettes, and folders, apparently searching for something specific. One of the raiders repeatedly said "It's not here," ("*No está*") to which another responded "Keep looking" ("*Seguí buscando*"). The men broke diskettes and threw posters with environmental justice slogans around the building's entrance.

After over an hour, the intruders left, possibly frightened off by the telephone's repeated ringing and arrival of a visitor. They took two laptop computers with data on the groups' activities and a camera with footage of a recent meeting of Mexican and Guatemalan environmental justice advocates opposed to the proposed *Plan Puebla Panamá* (PPP) treaty, held in June in Ixcán, Guatemala. However, clearly visible money and cars with keys in them were not taken.

Norma Maldonado works with an umbrella group *Mesa Global de Guatemala*, which includes *Mamá Maquín*, and is concerned about the effects on local communities of the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas and the PPP. Following the June Ixcán meeting, openly observed by personnel from the local military base, other attendees reportedly received death threats, and Norma Maldonado heard noises on her telephone which suggested it may have been bugged.

In recent months, actions by various Guatemalan and other groups concerned about the environmental and social effects of the PPP, and the climate of total secrecy in which such agreements have been negotiated, have attracted considerable international attention. Amnesty International fears that business interests with known ties to the Guatemalan military may be orchestrating intimidation of the leadership of environmental groups to silence their opposition to such treaties.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The raid on Norma Maldonado's residence occurred during a wave of politically-motivated violence in Guatemala City. On 24 July, as many as 5,000 supporters of General Efraín Ríos Montt rampaged through the capital, purportedly protesting recent court decisions upholding the Constitutional ban on coup participants, like the General, from running for presidential office. Many arrived on buses allegedly provided by the ruling *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (FRG), Guatemalan Republican Front political party, of which the General is a founding member. The protestors were allegedly given food, weapons and instructions by masked men, some of whom were recognized as FRG leaders. Under their direction, the mob committed acts of vandalism and violence, targeting noted opponents of the FRG, including judges who had ruled against the General's candidacy, opponents in the business and diplomatic communities, and journalists. One journalist died, apparently from a heart attack, shortly after escaping the mob; another was drenched in gasoline but was able to escape before being set alight. Human rights groups, many of whom have been vocal in their criticism of General Ríos Montt and his party, closed their offices and sought protection. The disturbances only concluded when the General himself reportedly ordered the mob to

disperse. Human Rights Procurator Sergio Morales subsequently announced that he had received word of a plan to execute a number of human rights activists, named on a black-list.

General Ríos Montt came to power in a 1982 coup and ruled the country during one of the most repressive periods of Guatemala's prolonged civil conflict. Since 2000, the FRG administration of President Alfonso Portillo has brought a marked deterioration in the human rights climate, with an alarming increase in intimidation, harassment, surveillance, abductions, attacks, and apparent extrajudicial executions directed against the human rights community, including those struggling for environmental justice. With General Ríos Montt determined to run for president, Amnesty International is gravely concerned that the current climate of heightened tensions may lead to further acts of violence in the lead-up to the November presidential elections.

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

- expressing grave concern for the safety of Norma Maldonado, members of *Mamá Maquín*, and other environmental justice activists who have opposed the *Plan Puebla Panamá* (PPP) treaty;
- pressing the authorities to carry out an immediate, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the raid on Normal Maldonado's residence, to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the government to ensure that the civilian population, including local environmental and human rights activists, are protected and that the rule of law is maintained in Guatemala, to avoid further incidents like the 24 July mob violence;
- urging the government to collaborate fully with the work of the proposed *Comisión para la Investigación de Cuerpos Illegales y Aparatos Clandestinos de Seguridad* (CICIACS), which is to investigate human rights abuses allegedly committed by illegal armed groups and clandestine security apparatus and to take immediate steps to dismantle such groups and prosecute those involved.

APPEALS TO:

President

President of the Republic of Guatemala
Llc. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a Avenida "A" 4-41, Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 238 3579
Salutation: Dear Mr. President/ Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Adolfo Reyes Calderón
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
6a Avenida 4-64, Zona 4, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 362 0237/362 0239
Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Attorney General

Lic. Carlos David de Leon Argueta
Fiscal General de la Republica
Fiscalia General del Ministerio Publico
8a. Avenida 10-57, Tercer nivel, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 221 2718
Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Senor Fiscal General

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Dr. Sergio Fernando Morales Alvarado

Procurador de los Derechos Humanos
12 Avenida, 12-72, Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: +502 2381 734

Newspaper

Diario Pensa Libre

13 Calle 9-31, Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala 01001, GUATEMALA
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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 12 September 2003.