

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 34/48/92

Distr: UA/SC

UA 358/92

Threats/Harassment

16 November 1992

GUATEMALA: **Ronalth Iván OCHAETA ARGUETA**
 Amílcar MÉNDEZ URÍZAR
 Fáctor MÉNDEZ DONINELLI
 and other human rights workers

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the physical safety of Ronalth Iván Ochaeta Argueta, Director of the Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG), Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric of Guatemala; Amílcar Méndez Urizar, President of Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas "Runujel Junam" (CERJ), Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all Equal"; Factor Méndez Doninelli, Director of the Centro de Investigación, Estudio y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CIEPRODH), Centre for the Investigation, Study and Promotion of Human Rights, and other human rights workers, following public statements made by the President of Guatemala, Jorge Serrano Elías, and the Minister of Defence, General José Domingo García Samayoa, between 11 and 12 November 1992. In their statements, the President and the Minister of Defence accused these three leading human rights defenders of having links with the guerrillas. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases where those named by government representatives as having links with the armed-opposition in Guatemala have subsequently become the targets of human rights violations, including extrajudicial execution, "disappearance" and torture.

According to information received by Amnesty International, on 11 November the Minister of Defence publicly accused Ronalth Ochaeta, Amílcar Méndez and Factor Méndez of "responding to the proposals of the URNG", (the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional de Guatemala (URNG), Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity). In his statement, the Minister of Defence also referred to a conference on torture in Guatemala organized by the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission in the United States of America and held in Washington, DC from 13 to 15 November, to which ODHAG, CERJ and CIEPRODH were sending representatives. He reportedly stated that the organizations were travelling to Washington to accuse the Guatemalan government of torture as well as of "making contemptible remarks...and in an irresponsible way accuse their own nation of totally false acts." He stated that their "manipulations...respond to the interests of the insurgency". Amnesty International is also concerned for the safety of those human rights defenders who travelled to the conference from Guatemala and are due to return to their homes now that the conference is over.

On 12 November President Jorge Serrano also singled out the above three human rights defenders, whom he accused of "destroying the image of the country and making us look like savages". "The army doesn't torture and the government doesn't torture", he said, adding that the insurgent links of Ronalth Ochaeta were "clear and conclusive". Over the years Amnesty International has documented thousands of human rights violations, including torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions, committed by the army or by civilians working with them, in the guise of the so-called "death squads".

These statements were seen by the Guatemalan human rights activists as a warning by the

government not to denounce human rights violations being carried out in Guatemala and not to attend the conference on torture in Washington. Amnesty International is concerned that, as a result of the government statements, reprisals may be carried out against those who attended the conference.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Those attempting to investigate and protect human rights in Guatemala have been long-term targets of abuses, and members of human rights groups have been harassed, threatened, "disappeared" or subjected to extrajudicial execution. On 12 October 1992 a bomb exploded at the offices of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo por el Aparecimiento con Vida de Nuestros Familiares (GAM), Mutual Support Group for the Appearance of Our Relatives Alive in Guatemala City, injuring GAM leader Juana Contreras.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defenders, Ronalht Ochaeta, Amílcar Méndez and Factor Méndez Doninelli, following statements made against them by the President of Guatemala and the Minister of Defence;
- asking for guarantees for their security and for the security of all human rights defenders in Guatemala, and particularly those who have attended the conference on torture in Washington DC.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic:

S.E. Jorge Serrano Elías
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
Palacio Nacional
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente /
Dear President**

Telegrams: Presidente Serrano, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telephone: + 502 2 21212, + 502 2 22266
Faxes: + 502 2 537472, + 502 2 519702
Telexes: 5331 CAPRES GU

2) Minister of Defence:

Gral. José García Samayoa
Ministerio de Defensa
Ministerio de Defensa
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro /
Dear Minister**

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telephone: + 502 2 21212, ext 743, 744, + 502 2 21904
Telexes: 5361 COMGUA GU

3) Minister of Foreign Relations:

Lic. Gonzalo Menéndez Park
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Palacio Nacional
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

**Salutation: Sr. Ministro /
Dear Minister**

Telegrams: Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telephone: + 502 2 21212 ext. 475, + 502 2 82827, 26748
Faxes: + 502 2 516745
Telexes: 5321 RELEXT GU

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Head of the Presidential Coordinating
Commission of

the Policies of the Executive relating to
Human Rights:

Sr. Bernardo Neumann
Presidente
Comisión Presidencial Coordinadora de la
Política del Ejecutivo en
materia de Derechos Humanos (COPREDEH)
15 Avenida 18-38, Zona 13
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric of
Guatemala:

Oficina de Derechos Humanos del
Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG)
Apartado Postal 723
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Director of the Centre for the Investigation,
Study and Promotion of Human Rights:

Lic. Factor Méndez Dominelli,
Centro de Investigación, Estudio y
Promoción de los Derechos Humanos
en Guatemala (CIEPRODH),
Apartado 491-I, Zona 7, Código 01907
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all
Equal":

Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas "Runujel
Junam" (CERJ),
5a Avenida 3-13,
Santa Cruz del Quiché
El Quiché
GUATEMALA

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 28 December 1992.