

UA 377/00

Fear for

GUATEMALA Mario Polanco

Dionisio Camajá Sánchez

Other members of GAM

Members of *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM), Mutual Support Group, a prominent Guatemalan human rights organization, have been threatened and intimidated, and a vehicle belonging to the organization has been stolen by heavily armed men.

On 9 December unidentified men driving a Toyota car with no registration number kept GAM member Mario Polanco's home under vigilance all day and part of the night. At 4.00 pm they called at the door, but when the family answered, they started laughing and said nothing. Polanco's family called the police, but did not get any assistance.

On 7 December GAM's pick-up truck was stolen from outside Polanco's home by three heavily armed, unidentified men. They threatened some passers-by and the driver, forcing him out of the truck and stealing it. The day before, an anonymous person had called Polanco's family, asking questions about the GAM vehicle and threatening Polanco: "Tell him [Polanco] to be careful because he is being watched". ("*Se le dijera que tuviera cuidado porque estaba siendo vigilado*"). The keys to GAM's offices were inside the vehicle, and there are fears that they may be raided, especially as suspicious people have been seen outside the offices.

On 3 December, Dionisio Camajá Sánchez, another GAM member was reportedly attacked by an army collaborator in the municipality of Uspantán, El Quiché department. GAM's Guatemala city offices later received a telephone death threat against Dionisio Camajá Sánchez. The caller, who claimed to belong to MINUGUA, the UN Mission in Guatemala, said: "Tell Dionisio to be careful and not to come back to Uspantán because something bad may happen to him" ("*dile a Dionisio que tenga cuidado y que mejor no regrese a Uspantán porque algo malo le puede pasar*").

Another GAM member, Xiomara Bedoya, was followed by unidentified men from 13 to 17 November.

After the 7 December car theft, GAM filed a legal complaint with the Minister of the Interior and the National Police Director. So far, the authorities appear to have taken no measures to guarantee the safety of GAM members.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On the same day that the GAM vehicle was stolen, the Guatemalan Supreme Court of Justice announced that it was giving a special mandate to the Human Rights Procurator to inquire into the fate of Mayra Gutiérrez Hernández, an academic who "disappeared" on 7 April 2000 (for more information see UA 93/00 and follow-up). GAM has been involved in the legal steps initiated since her "disappearance" to try and establish her whereabouts.

GAM is the oldest and one of the most respected human rights organizations in Guatemala. Its main objective is to uncover the truth about the thousands of people who "disappeared" during Guatemala's long civil conflict, which lasted for more than three decades.

In recent months, a wide range of Guatemalan human rights organizations and other sectors critical of the Government have been threatened or abused. The authorities

have done nothing to investigate or prevent such harassment. (See UA 315/00 and follow-up, UA 314/00, UA 310/00 and UA 265/00).

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

- calling on the authorities to guarantee the safety of Mario Polanco, Dionisio Camajá Sánchez, other GAM members and anyone involved in legitimate human rights work;
- calling on the authorities to immediately investigate this and all other cases of intimidation directed at Guatemala's human rights community, making the results public and bringing those responsible to justice;
- stressing the international obligation of the Guatemalan Government to support the work of human rights defenders, referring to the principles in the resolution "Human Rights Defenders in the Americas" adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, in Guatemala in June 1999.

APPEALS TO:

It can be difficult to get through to Guatemalan fax numbers and e-mail addresses. Please be patient and keep trying. If a voice answers, say 'fax por favor' and wait for the signal.

President of the Republic

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
 Presidente de la República de Guatemala
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E-mail: secgralp@infovia.com.gt
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Byron Barrientos
 Ministro de Gobernación
 Ministerio de Gobernación
 6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
 Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Fax: + 502 362 0239
Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

Director General of the National Civil Police

Sr. Rudio Lección Mérida
 Director General de la Policía Nacional Civil
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Salutation: Señor Director / Dear Director

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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 23 January 2001.