

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death Threats

26 August 1993

GUATEMALA: Dra. Brenda MERIDA (female), doctor

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of Dra. Brenda Mérida who has been receiving anonymous threats since April 1993. She is the doctor and director of a rural medical centre in the municipality of Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango department.

According to reports, on 23 April 1993, only a week after beginning work at the medical centre, Brenda Mérida received an anonymous telephone call in which the caller said: "Take care, this is your first time". On 26 April a report on the incident was submitted to the Judge of the Peace of Soloma, the human rights office in Huehuetenango, the mayor of Santa Eulalia and the human rights office of the Archbishop of Guatemala.

Subsequently, on 12 May and 26 June the doctor reportedly received further anonymous calls. On 24 July an unidentified man appeared to be watching Brenda Mérida at the medical centre and then left. On 31 July, after a meeting with some health workers, another unidentified man apparently followed the doctor to the town centre and again on 1 August she was reportedly followed by an unknown man. The following week, while sitting in a restaurant in Panajachel, a man reportedly took a photograph of her and then ran from the restaurant.

On 15 June and 2 July denunciations were made to the Minister of Defence and to the President of the Republic, respectively.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The medical centre where Brenda Mérida works, which was established in order to improve health care in the area, is situated on land previously occupied by the local office of the Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil, Civil Defence Patrols (PAC). It was apparently only with the support of the local military that the PAC agreed to move from the land. Another worker at the medical centre has also been harassed; in March 1993 an Italian doctor named Emanuela Saggi was photographed by an unidentified man.

The PAC were created as a component of the military's counter-insurgency strategy in 1982. Although voluntary according to the Constitution, civil patrols are in effect compulsory. Those refusing to take part in them have been branded "guerrillas", and many have been subjected to human rights violations, including harassment and attacks, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution.

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

- expressing concern at the harassment and threats received by Dra. Brenda Mérida;

- asking that these incidents be immediately investigated and that those found responsible be brought to justice;

- asking for guarantees for the safety of Dra. Brenda Mérida.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic:

S.E. Ramiro de León Carpio
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Telegrams: Presidente de León Carpio, Guatemala, Guatemala
Faxes: + 502 2 537472, + 502 2 519702
Telexes: 5331 CAPRES GU

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President

2) Minister of Interior:

Lic. Arnoldo Ortiz Moscoso
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
Despacho Ministerial, Of. No. 8
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Telegrams: Ministro de Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala
Faxes: + 502 2 518105
Telexes: 5085 MINGOB

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

3) Minister of Defence:

Gral. Mario Enríquez Morales
Ministro de Defensa
Ministerio de Defensa
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala
Faxes: + 502 2 537472
Telexes: 5361 COMGUA GU

Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

1) Human Rights Procurator:

Lic. Jorge García Laguardia
Procurador de los Derechos Humanos
12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1,
Guatemala, GUATEMALA
Faxes: + 502 2 81734

2) Head of the Presidential Commission Coordinating the Policies of the Executive relating to Human Rights:

Lic. Jorge Gonzalo Cabrera Hurtarte
Presidente
COPREDEH
15 Avenida 18-38, Zona 13
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

3) Archbishop's Human Rights Office:

Oficina de Derechos Humanos del
Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG)
Apartado Postal 723
Guatemala, 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 7 October 1993.