

PUBLIC

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17 June 2008

UA 170/08 Fear for safety/Death threats

HONDURAS Santos Feliciano Aguilar Álvares (m), member of the Garífuna community of San Juan  
Other members and leaders of the Garífuna community

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Santos Feliciano Aguilar Álvares was abducted, beaten and threatened with death on 5 June by up to 10 men, allegedly private security guards working for a local real estate company in San Juan. Santos Feliciano Aguilar Álvares is a member of the Afro-descendant Garífuna community of San Juan, Atlántida department, northern Honduras. A few hours before the incident, he had taken part in a community assembly attended by representatives of the local real estate company who he accused of pressurizing Garífuna people to sell their land.

At around 9.30pm on 5 June the unknown men surrounded Santos Feliciano Aguilar Álvares as he walked down a street in the outskirts of the San Juan village whilst on his way to carry out an errand. The group of men abducted Santos Aguilar and took him to premises owned by the real estate company and beat him. Whilst being held against his will, they accused Santos Aguilar of being “a spy for the leaders of Nuevo San Juan” (oreja de los directivos del Nuevo San Juan). The men intimidated Santos Aguilar by saying to each other “let’s kill him and bury him right here” (matémoslo y enterrémoslo aquí mismo).

Santos Feliciano Aguilar Álvares was released shortly after the beating and the injuries he sustained required hospital treatment. Amnesty International believes that his safety and that of other members of the Garífuna community is at risk.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Indigenous groups in Honduras, including the Afro-descendant Garífuna communities, have struggled for more than a decade to assert their right to the land they have inhabited for generations. Their land is coveted by companies seeking to build tourist resorts that would displace the Garífuna people.

Members of the community have suffered threats and acts of intimidation linked to their struggle to protect their land rights. In March and June 2006 Jessica García, one of the Garífuna leaders, was harassed and threatened at gun point to sign over land belonging to the community (UA 219/06, AMR 37/005/2006). In November 2005 an arson attack destroyed the property of Wilfredo Guerrero, another of the Garífuna leaders. Three young members of the same community were killed in 2006. Police officers have been charged in connection with these killings.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Santos Feliciano Aguilar Álvares and that of other members of the Garífuna Community of San Juan;
- urging the authorities to take immediate steps to implement the protection measures ordered by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to ensure the safety of the Garífuna community;
- calling for a swift, thorough, and impartial investigation on the threat and attack against Santos Aguilar and previous threats, attacks, and killings of leaders and members of the Garífuna community, to make the results public and to bring those responsible to justice;

- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals;
- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to end the intimidation of indigenous people.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Honduras Republic

Manuel Zelaya

Presidente de la República de Honduras

Casa Presidencial

Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo

Palacio José Cecilio del Valle

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax: +504 235 7700**

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

Minister of Security

Coronel (R) Jorge Alberto Rodas Gamero

Ministro

Ministerio de Seguridad Pública

Cuartel Casa Mata

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax: +504 220 1756**

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

Special Prosecutor for Ethnic Affairs in the Attorney Generals Office

Licda. Jany del Cid

Fiscal Especial de las Etnias

Edificio Castillo Poujol, 4a Avda, Colonia Palmira, Boulevard Morazán

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**Fax: +504 221 5620 extension 2122 (business hours only)**

**Salutation: Dear Madam/Estimada Sra. Fiscal Especial**

**COPIES TO:**

Local human rights organization

Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña, OFRANEH

Apdo. Postal 341

La Ceiba, Atlántida, Honduras

Email: ofraneh@yahoo.com

and to diplomatic representatives of Honduras accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 July 2008