

UA 26/02

Fear for

**HONDURAS Dr Leo Valladares Lanza (m), National Commissioner for Human Rights
Sonia Marlina Dubón (f), Deputy Commissioner**

The National Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras, Dr Leo Valladares Lanza, and the Deputy Commissioner, Sonia Marlina Dubón, have received anonymous telephone death threats. The threats are thought to be linked to the fact that the Commissioner has wide powers to investigate official corruption, and is also involved in the appointment of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court and the judicial system are widely perceived as the most corrupt institution in the country. A new system for appointing the Supreme Court's 15 judges was recently introduced, which was intended to end this apparent corruption. Under the new system, a Nominating Board (*Junta Nominadora*) draws up a shortlist of 45 candidates, from which the parliament, the National Congress (*Congreso Nacional*) chooses the final 15, who sit on the Supreme Court for seven years.

Sonia Marlina Dubón was one of a shortlist of candidates for appointment to the Supreme Court. Dr Valladares was one of the seven-member Nominating Board which drew up the shortlist, from 169 applicants. On 22 January one of the rejected applicants appealed to the Supreme Court, which ruled in his favour within hours: the list was nullified, and the Board was dissolved.

This decision has caused dismay among human rights organisations and business groups, as it appears to confirm the widespread perception of the Court and the judicial system as corrupt. The Court was to have been appointed by 26 January. The new president, Ricardo Maduro, takes office the following day.

On 21 January Dr Valladares published a report on the right to information and freedom of expression in Honduras (called the *Primer informe sobre el derecho a la información y la libertad de expresión en Honduras*) which points to the high level of control exerted by the government and economic interests on journalists and the media.

In June 1998, Hurricane Mitch left hundreds of thousands homeless and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure. Dr Valladares accused the government of corruption in its management of the foreign aid intended to help the survivors. The government responded by attempting to limit his powers and reduce his period in office, but backed down after an international outcry.

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

- expressing serious concern about reports that Dr Leo Valladares, National Commissioner for Human Rights and his Deputy Sonia Marlina Dubón have received death threats;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into these threats and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for immediate and effective measures to ensure their protection in order to enable them to carry out their activities without fear for their safety.

APPEALS TO:

Until 26 January:
President

S.E. Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé
Presidente de la República de Honduras
Casa Presidencial
Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo
Palacio José Cecilio del Valle
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Telegrams: Presidente, Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Fax: + 504 234 1484
Salutation: Sr. Presidente/Dear President

From 27 January onwards

S.E. Ricardo Maduro
Presidente de la República de Honduras
[address as above]

Attorney General
Dr. Roy Edmundo Medina
Fiscal General de la República
Fiscalía General, Ministerio Público
Edificio Castillo Poujol, 4a Avda,
Colonia Palmira, Boulevard Morazán
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Telegrams: Fiscal General, Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Fax: + 504 221 5667
Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General/Attorney General

COPIES TO:

National Human Rights Organization
Coordinadora Nacional contra la Impunidad
Apartado Postal 1243
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Oficina del Comisionado Nacional de Protección
de los Derechos Humanos (CONADEH)
Avda. La Paz No. 2444
Contiguo a Galerías La Paz
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Fax: +504 221 0536
Salutation: Dear Commissioner/Sr. Comisionado

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 8 March 2002.