

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 41/32/97

UA 140/97

Fear for safety

13 May 1997

MEXICO Members of PRODH, human rights organization

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Since 5 May 1997, the offices of the *Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, A.C.*, (PRODH), Human Rights Centre Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez, have been under surveillance by as many as 20 unidentified armed men, with a variety of vehicles and equipment at their disposal. PRODH members have been continuously followed, watched, photographed and filmed in their daily activities. Members have also been followed on leaving the offices in the evening. Everybody entering and leaving the offices has been conspicuously registered.

The group of armed men refused to identify themselves and were aggressive and threatening when approached by the members of the PRODH and the *Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal*, (CDHDF), Federal District Human Rights Commission, a governmental human rights body who had been asked to witness the intimidatory presence of the group.

Government authorities have denied ordering the surveillance, and the identity of the group of men, presumed to be members of the security forces, remains unknown.

Members of PRODH have been the target of death threats and intimidation before (see below), and the present intimidatory and blatant surveillance operation conducted by armed men appears to be part of this orchestrated campaign against the PRODH.

The renewal of the campaign coincides with the arrival at PRODH's offices on 5 May of eight of 12 international observers, who the Mexican authorities claim took part in a march for peace in the state of Chiapas, and who are in the process of being expelled from the country. The surveillance activity became particularly intense when one of the international observers, Italian national Riccardo Vitale, arrived at the offices on 8 May. Fears for his safety were such that he was provided with an escort to the airport by the Italian embassy.

PRODH's offices continue to be watched, though a new set of individuals are now conducting the operation after the original group were photographed by journalists.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A number of international human rights monitors have had their visas withdrawn by Mexican immigration officials and expelled or asked to leave Mexico in the last three weeks (See EXTRA 54/97, AMR 41/20/97, 18 April 1997, and follow ups AMR 41/21/97, 21 April; AMR 41/23/97, 22 April; and AMR 41/27/97, 25 April).

National and international human rights non-governmental organizations have energetically condemned the expulsion of international human rights monitors by the Mexican authorities (see also News Service 70/97, AMR 41/22/97, 21 April 1997).

Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action on 8 May 1997 calling for an investigation into the death threats received by members of CONPAZ, a human rights organization in Chiapas. The threats were apparently made in response to the organization's work on the case of the 12 international observers threatened with expulsion.

Last year, UA 200/96 (AMR 41/43/96, 13 August 1996) and five follow-ups (AMR 41/51/96, 29 August; AMR 41/56/96, 26 September; AMR 41/62/96, 11 October; AMR 41/72/96, 11 November, AMR 41/79/96, 27 November) were issued calling for an investigation to be opened into a campaign of intimidation, harassment and death threats against members of the PRODH. To Amnesty International's knowledge no one has been brought to justice for any of these crimes.

In the last follow-up UA issued on 18 December 1996, Amnesty International welcomed the official creation by the Mexican government of a special body for investigating violations against human rights defenders. Despite official statements confirming the creation of such a body, Amnesty International, has since learned that it was never established.

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

- expressing concern at the intimidatory surveillance of PRODH members and their office;
- calling for effective measures to ensure the safety of all PRODH members and for those responsible for ordering the surveillance operation to be investigated;
- requesting to be kept informed about measures adopted to prevent attacks, threats and harassment and about the investigations carried out into the threats made against members of PRODH during 1996;
- reminding the authorities of their commitment to establish a special body within the *Procuraduría General de la República*, Attorney General's Office, for investigating violations against human rights defenders.

APPEALS TO:

1. Minister of the Interior:

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 Secretario de Gobernación
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Faxes: + 52 5 546 5350 / +52 5 535 99 52

Salutation: Sr. Secretario / Dear Minister

2. Attorney General of the Republic

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 06300 México D.F., MEXICO

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Salutation: Sr. Procurador de la República / Dear Attorney General

3) Attorney General of the Federal District

Lic. José Antonio González Fernández

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Salutation: Sr. Procurador General del D.F./ Dear Attorney General

COPIES TO:

1. Human rights organization
Centro de Derechos Humanos
"Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez" A.C.
Puebla N. 153 Col. Roma,
06700 México D.F. MEXICO

2. Newspaper
Sr. Director
La Jornada
Balderas 68
06050 México D.F., MEXICO

and to diplomatic representatives of Mexico accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 July 1997.