

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 53/02/97

UA 117/97

Fear for safety

25 April 1997

VENEZUELA Mercedes PÉREZ (f)

Nury PERNIA (f)

and other members of AMBAR

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On 23 April 1997, members of the municipal police of the Libertador Municipality, in Caracas, attempted to raid the offices of the *Asociación de Mujeres para el Bienestar y Ayuda Recíproca (AMBAR)*, Association of Women for Welfare and Mutual Help, a non-governmental organization in Caracas, alleging that they had the right to inspect their offices. The police officers did not have a search warrant.

Mercedes Pérez and Nury Pernia, education coordinator and general coordinator of AMBAR, respectively, stopped them from entering their premises, in the face of claims by the police officers that the women "did not have the moral right to stop this type of procedure, since sex workers are people without any type of rights" ("*no teníamos condición moral para no permitir este procedimiento ya que las trabajadoras sexuales somos personas sin ningún tipo de derechos...*"). The police left the offices threatening to return.

AMBAR had recently denounced the harassment of sex workers by the municipal police in the television program "24 horas" (24 hours). AMBAR, a member of the *Coordinadora de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales de Mujeres*, (CONG, an umbrella organization of women's groups), provides legal advice to women employed as sex workers, who are often reportedly harassed by the security forces for their activities. AMBAR also lobbies the Venezuelan authorities to introduce legislative measures to protect sex workers and works on AIDS prevention.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has documented a pattern of harassment by the security forces of individuals targeted for their sexual orientation or perceived sexual activities. The *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*, Law of Vagrants and Crooks, a measure which permits the administrative detention of individuals for up to five years, has been used in the past to imprison homosexuals accused of prostitution by the police (see *Venezuela: The Law of Vagrants and Crooks: Suppressing dissent and punishing the poor*, AMR 53/01/95, April 1995).

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

- expressing concern at the harassment of members of AMBAR, including the attempted illegal search of their offices, by members of the municipal police of the Libertador municipality, on 23 April 1997;
- requesting that AMBAR be allowed to carry out its peaceful and legal activities free from fear and intimidation.

#### APPEALS TO:

##### 1) Minister of the Presidency

Doctor Asdrúbal Aguiar  
Secretaría de la Presidencia  
Palacio de Miraflores  
Caracas, Venezuela

Faxes: +58 2 861 0793

**Telegrams: Secretaría de la Presidencia, Caracas, Venezuela**  
**Salutation: Sr. Ministro / Dear Minister**

2) Attorney General

Dr Iván Darío Badell González  
Fiscal General de la República  
Esquina de Manduca a Ferrenquín,  
Caracas, Venezuela

**Telegrams: Fiscal General, Caracas, Venezuela**

**Fax: + 58 2 564 7461**

**Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General**

**COPIES TO:**

1. Women's umbrella organization

Sras.

CONG de Mujeres

Apartado Postal 47468

Chaguaramos, Caracas 1041-A

Venezuela

2. Newspaper

Sr. Director

El Universal

Edif. El Universal

Av. Urdaneta

Esq. de Animas

Caracas, Venezuela

and to diplomatic representatives of VENEZUELA accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 June 1997.