

PUBLIC

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UA 237/05

Fear for safety/death threat

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Father Pedro Ruquoy (m), human rights defender, aged 52

The head of security at a sugar plantation, who is also an army colonel, has reportedly threatened to murder human rights defender Father Pedro Ruquoy, apparently because of his work on behalf of Dominican peasants and Haitian migrants working in sugar cane plantations. Amnesty International believes his life is in danger.

The colonel made the threat on or around 24 August, at a meeting of the Barahona sugar cane plantation's security guards in *Batay* (plantation workers' settlement) number 7. He allegedly claimed that he was just waiting for a signal from the plantation owner to kill Father Ruquoy. The colonel is no longer working for the plantation, but the threat remains real and credible.

Father Ruquoy, a Belgian national who has permanent residence in the Dominican Republic, has recently been criticized by government officials for his work defending the rights of Haitian migrant workers and Dominican peasants. The press has also reported that the director of the government's National Institute of Sugar (*Instituto Nacional del Azúcar*) has accused Father Ruquoy, and another priest working on similar issues, of trying to "destroy the sugar [industry's] infrastructure" [*destruir la infraestructura azucarera*] by reporting the situation of Haitian migrant workers to the United Nations Commission for Human Rights and the World Trade Organisation in order that these organisations condemn the Dominican government and impose sanctions on the sugar industry.

In August 2000, Father Pedro Ruquoy testified to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) regarding the treatment of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. His testimony was misrepresented in the press as an attack on the Dominican government, and since then he has been subjected to intimidation. The IACHR called on the Dominican government to take measures to guarantee his safety. Despite this, throughout 2001 Amnesty International received reports of Father Ruquoy being threatened and intimidated. In April that year he was apparently threatened at knifepoint in his home: he was not given police protection until two months later.

In November 2004, Father Ruquoy was attacked as he distributed food to a crowd at his home. He was hit by a stone and lost consciousness for half an hour, before he was taken to hospital (see UA 324/04, AMR 27/007/2004, 29 November 2004).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defender Father Pedro Ruquoy, whom an army colonel has reportedly threatened to kill;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective action to guarantee Father Pedro Ruquoy's safety and ensure that he can carry out his legitimate and important work for the defence of human rights;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the death threat, with the results made public and for those found responsible to be brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisal.

APPEALS TO:

S.E. Leonel Fernández
Presidente de la República
Palacio Nacional
Santo Domingo
Dominican Republic

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Email: correspondencias@presidencia.gov.do

Salutation: Su Excelencia Señor Presidente

Sr. Franklin Almeyda Rancier
Secretario de Estado del Interior y la Policía
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Salutation: Señor Secretario

Doctor Manuel de Jesús Pérez Sánchez
Mayor General
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Sr. Francisco Domínguez Brito
Procurador General de la República
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Salutation: Dear Mr Brito/ Estimado Señor Brito

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the Dominican Republic accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 October 2005.