

14 October 2002

**EL SALVADOR** Dr Guillermo Matta (m), President of *Colegio Médico*,  
the Medical Association  
Dr Melvin Guardado (m), President of *Asociación de Médicos del Sistema  
Nacional de Salud*, the Association of Doctors in the National  
Health Service  
Dr Ricardo Alfaro Barahona (m), Secretary General of the  
*Sindicato de Médicos Trabajadores del Instituto de Seguro  
Social (SIMETRISS)*, Doctors' Union in the Institute of  
Social Security  
And some 27 other health professionals

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Dr Guillermo Matta, President of *Colegio Médico*, the Medical Association, Dr Melvin Guardado, President of the *Asociación de Médicos del Sistema Nacional de Salud*, Association of Doctors in the National Health Service, Dr Ricardo Alfaro Barahona, Secretary General of the *Sindicato de Médicos Trabajadores del Instituto de Seguro Social (SIMETRISS)*, Doctors' Union in the Institute of Social Security, and approximately 27 other health professionals, have received death threats. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

The anonymous threats were communicated in telephone calls to the individuals' homes, all in the capital, San Salvador. It is thought that they have been threatened as a result of their involvement in trade union protests against government plans to privatize health services.

The threats allegedly come from a self styled "death squad" calling itself *Comando de Exterminio*, Extermination Command. Death squads and paramilitary groups were responsible for the systematic secret murder, torture and "disappearance" of suspected government opponents during the 1980s and early 1990s. They benefited from total impunity, as nobody was ever brought to justice for these crimes. There have been no reports of active death squads for several years. Any re\_emergence of such groups would be cause for grave concern.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Trade unions, doctors and other health personnel have for some years been involved in opposition to government plans to privatize health services, which they considered to have been started by outsourcing ancillary services. They claim that this will negatively affect the population's health care. In September 2002 the health care workers' union, *Sindicato de Trabajadores del Instituto de Seguro Social (STISS)*, Union of Workers in the Institute of Social Security, and the doctors' union *Sindicato de Médicos Trabajadores del Instituto de Seguro Social (SIMETRISS)*, Doctors' Union in the Institute of Social Security, went on strike in support of their efforts to stop privatization. The strike is still in progress and has led to several hospitals being closed down. The government has threatened doctors and health care staff that they will be dismissed if they do not return to work.

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

\_ expressing concern at the reports of death threats against Guillermo Matta, Melvin Guardado, Ricardo Alfaro Barahona and some 27 others;  
- urging the government to take immediate and effective action to protect all those who have been threatened;

\_ calling for an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into these threats and for those responsible to be brought to justice;

- calling for an immediate investigation into reports of the re-emergence of "death squads";

- calling on the authorities to ensure that people are free to carry out their legitimate trade union activities.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of El Salvador

S.E. Francisco Flores

Presidente de la República de El Salvador

Casa Presidencial

Avda. Los Diplomáticos, Calle México

B° San Jacinto

San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegram: Presidente de la República, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Fax: + 503 243 9947**

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

Minister of Justice

Lic. Francisco Bertrand Galindo

Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad Pública

6a Calle Oriente No 42

Antiguo Local Policía Nacional

San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegram: Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad Pública, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Fax: + 503 245 2650**

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

Attorney General

Sr. Belisario Amadeo Artiga

Fiscal General

Fiscalía General de la República

Centro de Gobierno, 5° Piso

San Salvador, El Salvador

**Telegram: Fiscal General, San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Fax: + 503 225 6171**

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

**COPIES TO:**

Minister for Public Health

Sr. José López Beltrán

Ministro de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social

Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social

Calle Arce 827

San Salvador, El Salvador

**Fax: + 503 221 0985**

Non-governmental Organization

Oficina de Tutela Legal del Arzobispado

Comisión Archidiecésana de Justicia y Paz

Urbanización Isidro Menéndez,

Calle San José y Avda. Las Américas,

San Salvador, El Salvador

**Fax: + 503 225 2603**

and to diplomatic representatives of El Salvador accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 November 2002.