

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 36/93 Threats/Harassment

12 February 1993

GUATEMALA: Staff of the Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala (AVANCSO), Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala

Amnesty International is concerned at acts of intimidation, including threats and harassment, against staff and associates of the Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala (AVANCSO), Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala. These acts of intimidation appear to be linked to the judicial proceedings against an army sergeant, Noel de Jesús Beteta Alvarez, for the killing in September 1990 of one of the founding members of AVANCSO, the leading anthropologist Myrna Mack.

Towards the end of 1992 heavy surveillance was observed around AVANCSO's offices in Guatemala City, including various people watching the offices and taking note of the licence plates of the cars of those entering and leaving the building. Since then a series of incidents of harassment and threats have been reported by staff. It is believed that the security forces may be behind these incidents.

The night porter for the AVANCSO building reported that on 1 January 1993 a small group of uniformed members of the armed forces came to the offices while a second group waited at the corner of a nearby street. It was approximately 10.00pm and the soldiers asked the night porter for the whereabouts of one of AVANCSO's staff members. Following this incident the night porter handed in his resignation. On 4 January his replacement received an anonymous telephone call to AVANCSO telling him "*Ten cuidado que los canchitos te pueden romper el culo.*" ("Be careful because the "*canchitos*" (a term frequently used to refer to the guerrillas) can break your backside").

Several staff members also reported being followed during January. In mid-January a person working opposite the AVANCSO offices reported to staff that he had seen one of them being followed and had heard one of those carrying out the surveillance comment that the staff person was under close surveillance. During that same week the security guard for AVANCSO reported seeing a man watching the offices throughout the night, and on 15 January a man whom AVANCSO staff recognized as a well-known member of the security forces was seen watching their offices. With him was a woman who was taking notes.

The most disturbing incident was that of 10 February, when at approximately 3.00 pm three young people followed María Elena Dávila de Torres, a cleaner at AVANCSO, as she was walking in Guatemala City. She was grabbed and her face pushed against a wall. She was told to pass on a message saying that they knew that the sister of Myrna Mack had been to AVANCSO; that they knew that she arrived at 9.00 and had left at 12.30; that they had followed her but lost her; that the woman with long white hair who left with her should be warned that if she continued to associate with Myrna's sister then "she would be the first to go". Myrna Mack's sister Helen was indeed at AVANCSO at the precise time the assailants said and was accompanied as she left by Clara Arenas, AVANCSO's director. Helen Mack has played a major role in the court case against Noel de Jesús Beteta, the army sergeant charged with Myrna Mack's assassination.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 11 September 1990, Myrna Mack Chang, the anthropologist and sociologist, was stabbed

to death by two men in Guatemala City, reportedly by members of the security forces. On 5 August 1991 José Miguel Mérida Escobar the head of the Homicide Section in the Department of Criminal Investigation (Departamento de Investigaciones Criminológicas) (DIC), of the Guatemalan National Police, and responsible for the investigation into the killing of Myrna Mack, was killed in circumstances suggesting official security force involvement. In his report he stated that the reasons for her killing were political and gave evidence of the involvement of the army sergeant Noel de Jesús Beteta. Noel de Jesús Beteta Alvarez was charged with the murder of Myrna Mack in December 1991. Since the trial proceedings began many of those associated with the case have been threatened and harassed. On 22 January 1993 two key witnesses to the

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killing of Myrna Mack received written anonymous death threats warning them not to testify before the sentencing judge. Following these threats one of the witnesses did not appear in court to testify the day he was summoned. (see UA 20/93, AMR 34/02/93, 28 January 1993). The court case has now reached its final stages.

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

- expressing concern at the reported incidents, including surveillance, threats and intimidation against AVANCSO staff as well as those involved in the court case investigating the assassination of Myrna Mack;
- asking that these incidents be immediately investigated and those found to be responsible brought to justice;
- urging that the safety of AVANCSO staff and those involved in the court case be guaranteed.

APPEALS TO

1) President of the Republic:

S.E. Jorge Serrano Elías
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegrams: Presidente Serrano, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telephone: + 502 2 21212 / + 502 2 22266
Faxes: + 502 2 537472 / + 502 2 519702
Telexes: 5331 CAPRES GU

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President

2) Minister of the Interior:

Lic. Francisco Perdomo
Ministro de Gobernación
Despacho Ministerial
Oficina No. 8, Primer Nivel
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegrams: Ministro Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telephone: + 502 2 21212, ext 500 / + 502 2 518105-6 (direct)
Faxes: + 502 2 518105
Telexes: 5085 MINGOB GU

Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

3) Minister of Defence:

Gral. José García Samayoa
Jefe del Estado Mayor de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa
Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telegrams: Ministro Defensa, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telephone: + 502 2 21212, ext 2226
Telexes: 5361 COMGUA GU

Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister

4) Interim Attorney General:

Lic. Edgar Tuna Valladares
Procurador General de la Nación
Procuraduría General de la Nación
18 Calle 10-36, Zona 1, Guatemala
Guatemala
Telegrams: Procurador General, Guatemala, Guatemala
Telephone: + 502 2 64697 / + 502 2 313656 / + 502 2 518385

Salutation: Señor Procurador General / Dear Attorney General

COPIES TO: TWO OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

President of the Supreme Court:

Lic. Juan José Rodil Peralta
Presidente de la Corte
Suprema de Justicia
Centro Cívico, 21a Calle y 7a Avenida
Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Human Rights Procurator:

Lic. Ramiro de León Carpio
Procurador de Derechos Humanos
Avenida Simeón Cañas 10-61
Zona 2,
Guatemala, Guatemala

Newspaper:

Diario Siglo XXI
7a Avenida 11-79
Edificio Galerias España, 6o piso
Zona 9, Guatemala, Guatemala

Human Rights Organization:

Oficina de Derechos Humanos
Arzobispado de Guatemala
Apartado Postal 723
Guatemala, Guatemala

and to diplomatic representatives of Guatemala accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 March 1993.