

GUATEMALA **Ovidio Paz Bal (m), Legal Advisor, Defensoría indígena, (Indigenous Defence), Sololá, Western highlands of Guatemala.**

Ovidio Paz Bal, who works for an organisation that promotes the rights of Guatemala's indigenous people, has been receiving telephone death threats. Amnesty International is concerned for his safety.

Ovidio Paz Bal is the Legal Advisor of the Sololá branch of the non-governmental organization *Defensoría indígena* (Indigenous Defence). He has been receiving anonymous phone calls at his home since 26 January, always with the same message: "los vamos a matar, los vamos a matar", ("we are going to kill you, we are going to kill you".) In the space of 24 hours he received 10 calls.

The threats are believed to come from groups trying to hinder the work of *Defensoría indígena*. Since May 2000 there has been a marked increase in abuses against activists working to protect human rights, including those rights agreed in the 1995 Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Measures agreed in the accord, but not yet implemented, would give indigenous peoples a wide range of economic, social and cultural rights, which powerful sectors in Guatemala view as highly threatening to their interests.

The escalation of abuses against people advocating such rights appeared to coincide with the appointment of hardline military officials to important positions in the administration of President Alfonso Portillo who had come to office at beginning 2000. In July that year for example, two staff members of another organization working to advance indigenous rights were killed in Sololá Department.

Ovidio Paz Bal has reported these threats to the governmental Human Rights Procurator (Ombudsman), the United Nations Human Rights Verification Mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA), which is verifying the implementation of the 1996 UN-brokered Peace Accords which formally ended Guatemala's long-running civil conflict, and the Human Rights Commission of Congress (COPREDEH).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For over three decades Guatemala was wracked by internal conflict between the army and the armed opposition, during which the army carried out a scorched earth counter-insurgency campaign, systematically targeting indigenous people in the west and northwest of the country, intending to annihilate the guerrillas' social base in rural Mayan communities. They killed tens of thousands of non-combatant indigenous men, women and children.

The conflict was formally ended by the 1996 Peace Accords. *Defensoría indígena* was set up in the 1980s, initially to seek justice for abuses committed by paramilitary groups and others during the early 1980s. Today it works within the framework of the indigenous accord to promote indigenous rights, resolve community conflicts using traditional indigenous practices and promote the recognition of the authority of traditional Mayan leaders within the state structure.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Ovidio Paz Bal, who has been receiving death threats, apparently linked to his work for *Defensoría indígena* in Sololá department, and urging the authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure his safety;
- calling on the authorities to carry out a full investigation into the threats;
- urging the authorities to investigate the allegations of a pattern of intimidation against activists working to advance indigenous rights.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Guatemala

Lic. Alfonso Portillo Cabrera
Presidente de la República de Guatemala
6a. Avenida "A" 4-41, Zona 1,
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 239 0090

Email: mensajes@presidenteportillo.gob.gt

Salutation: Dear President/Señor Presidente

Attorney General of the Republic

Lic. Adolfo González Rodas
Fiscal General de la República
Ministerio Público
8a. Avenida 10-67 Zona 1
Tercer nivel
Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Telegrams: Fiscal General, Guatemala, Guatemala

Fax: + 502 221 2718 (directo)

Salutation: Señor Fiscal

Minister of the Interior

Sr. Eduardo Arévalo Lacs
Ministro de Gobernación
Ministerio de Gobernación
6ª Avenida 4-64, Zona 4
Ciudad de Guatemala , GUATEMALA

Fax: +502 362 0239/362 0237

Email: monica24@intelnet.net.gt

Telegrams: Ministro de Gobernación, Guatemala, Guatemala

Salutation: Señor Ministro

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Procurator

Lic. Julio Eduardo Arango Escobar
Procurador de Derechos Humanos
Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos
12 Avenida 12-72, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala 01001, GUATEMALA

Telegram: Procurador de Derechos Humanos, Guatemala

Telefax: +502 230 0874-76

Fax: +502 238 1734

E-mail: opdhg@guatenet.net.gt
Salutation: Señor Procurador

Human Rights Organization

Defensoría Indígena
9a calle 4-60, zona 1,
Sololá, Sololá.
Guatemala
Email: defendig@intelnet.net.gt

Newspaper

CERIGUA
2a calle 1-42, Zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: + 502 221 2521
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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 19 March 2002.