

**GUATEMALA Ronalith Ochaeta (Archbishop's Human Rights Office), church figures, and others involved with ODHA and the REMHI report**

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Amnesty International is extremely concerned for the safety of Ronalith Ochaeta, whose home was raided by gunmen on 16 April 1999. The organisation also fears for the safety of other church figures and others involved with the Guatemalan church's 1998 REMHI, Recuperation of the Historical Memory, Report.

Ronalith Ochaeta is the director of the *Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado* (ODHA), Archbishop's Human Rights Office. On 16 April, at around 9.00 am, three gunmen forced their way into his house, east of Guatemala City, threatened a servant and put a gun to the head of Ochaeta's four-year-old son. They left after searching the house for 40 minutes, leaving a box disguised as a bomb with a piece of brick inside, an apparent allusion to the cement block which was used to batter Bishop Juan José Gerardi Conedera to death almost exactly a year ago (see UA 139/98, 1 May 1998, AMR 34/16/98).

The United Nations Mission for Guatemala (MINUGUA), set up to verify the Guatemalan government's compliance with the Global Agreement on Human Rights, which it signed in March 1994, said that the intimidation of Ronalith Ochaeta was "*de suma gravedad*", extremely serious, especially because he was "*el brazo derecho*", the right-hand man, of Bishop Gerardi. MINUGUA called on the government to ensure the security of all who work for human rights.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The raid on Ronalith Ochaeta's house follows a series of threats against Guatemalan church figures and others who have worked with ODHA and/or the REMHI report. Those reporting threats in recent weeks include Archbishop Próspero Penados del Barrio; Mons. Mario Ríos Montt, auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Guatemala; and Mynor Melgar and Nery Rodenas, legal advisers to the ODHA.

The former Auxiliary Bishop of Guatemala, Juan José Gerardi Conedera, Coordinator of ODHA, was murdered on 26 April 1998, just two days after he had presided over the presentation of the church's REMHI report into atrocities carried out during Guatemala's civil conflict, which lasted more than three decades. Based on a three year study of over 55,000 reported human rights violations, the REMHI Project concluded that some 79% had been carried out by the security forces. Bishop Gerardi had spearheaded the investigation.

On Monday 26 April the first anniversary of Bishop Gerardi's murder will be commemorated. No one has as yet have been brought to justice for his murder.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Ronalith Ochaeta, the other church figures and ODHA workers who have recently been threatened, and for all those working for human rights;
- calling for immediate and adequate measures to guarantee their safety;
- calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the reported threats and intimidation, and urging that those responsible be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to bring to justice anyone found to have been involved in the murder of Bishop Gerardi, regardless of their position.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic of Guatemala

S.E. Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen, Presidente de la República de Guatemala  
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**Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente / Dear President Irigoyen**

Minister of Foreign Relations

Lic. Eduardo Stein, Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores

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**Salutation: Señor Ministro / Dear Minister**

Attorney General

Lic. Adolfo González Rodas, Fiscal General de la República

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**Salutation: Señor Fiscal / Dear Attorney General**

Procurator General

Lic. Carlos García Regás, Procurador General de la Nación

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**Salutation: Señor Procurador / Dear Attorney General**

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**Salutation: Estimados señores / Dear Sir**

Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric

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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 2 June 1999.